"Where there is no vision the people perish"

MARCH 1944 APRIL

The Poetry Review

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POETRY, TYPOGRAPHY AND PROSE

MORE and more of recent years there has been a tendency to reduce the differences between poetry and prose to a mere matter of typography. More and more we have been inclined to see the test of poetry in the way a piece of work is printed, rather than in the way it sounds or the way it appeals to the emotions and the imagination. Following a very considerable part of the recent output, and particularly of the more highly-praised recent output, I have been increasingly concerned to observe how frequently the publishers accept and the critics applaud offerings whose only observable relationship to poetry is in their appearance on the printed page. Is it that we have ceased to value or to understand the older pre-requisites of poetry, such as melody of expression, the witchery and suggestiveness of words, and the evocation of moods of wonder, delight, nobility, grief, terror, or dismay ? Is it that we have ceased to esteem the spirit of poetry and care only for the surfaces ? Or have we been so confused and befuddled that we accept apathetically and uncritically the grade-label "poetry" as all-sufficient proof that we are being proferred something more than mere prose ?

In order to indicate my meaning, let me offer one or two examples from recent books. And by way of suggesting the extent to which modern verse writers depend upon typography for their effects, let me take the liberty of stripping the pieces of their typographical trappings and quoting them in the form of prose. Note, for instance, the following :

> "It seems, as one becomes older, that the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence—or even development : the latter a partial fallacy, encouraged by superficial notions of evolution, which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning the past. The moments of happiness—not the sense of well-being, fruition, fulfilment, security or affection, or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination—we had the experience but missed the meaning . . . ."

This bit of prose—a rather turgid and poorly-written bit of prose—is a typical excerpt from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. It here appears precisely as in the book, except that the measured lines and the capitalizations at the beginning of lines have been dropped.

Here is a quotation from another well-known modern poet :

> "There were a hundred and forty-four, all told, in the three small ships. You can read the names, if you like, in various spellings. They are English names, William Tankard, Jeremy Alicock, Jonas Profit, the sailor, James Read, the blacksmith, Love, the tailor, and Nicholas Scott, the drum. One labourer is put down with a mere "Ould Edward," although, no doubt, they knew his name at the time, but, looking back and remembering, it is hard to recollect every name."

No ! this undistinguished passage of prose does not occur in the course of a novel. It is from Stephen Vincent Benet's *Western Star ;* and, far from being exceptional, it is characteristic of the book.

It will suffice, for the sake of brevity, to quote but one more example ; although as every follower of modern poetry will realise, the possible illustrations are innumerable. My third choice is from a poet who enjoys a reputation unexcelled by any recent American :

> "They headed for the barn ; I stayed where I was. They told me afterward. First they forked hay, a lot of it, out into the barn floor. Nothing ! They listened for him. Not a rustle. I guess they thought I'd spiked him in the temple before I buried him, or I couldn't have managed. They excavated more.

'Go keep his wife out of the barn.' Someone looked in a window, and curse me if he wasn't in the kitchen slumped way down in a chair, with both his feet against the stove, the hottest day that summer."

If this is poetry, then are not the baldest of newspaper accounts and even the homeliest of short stories also poetry ? Even as prose, it deserves a basement rating. Yet, as the reader will probably have recognised, it is from *The Code,* by that four-times winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, Robert Frost ; and it is neither more nor less poetic in content and expression than most of that writer's celebrated blank verse pieces.

However, the critic may argue that I have taken an unfair advantage of Mr. Frost, as of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Benet. He may contend that the appearance of a poem on the printed page is of basic importance, since it offers essential aid to the reader ; and he may remark that even the acknowledged classics would lose the aspect of poetry if subjected to the same treatment as the passages quoted above. In order to discover whether there be any validity in this view, therefore, it is only fair to see how passages from some of the older poets will stand up under the test of prose typography. Since rhymes would constitute a disturbing element, and since there are no rhymes in the passages from Frost, Eliot and Benet, a fair comparison demands that we confine ourselves to selections of blank verse. Take, then, the following :

"Yet not to thine eternal resting-place shall thou retire alone, nor could'st thou wish couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down with patriarchs of the infant world—with kings, the powerful of the earth—the wise, the good, fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past, all in one mighty sepulchre. The hills rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun—the vales stretching in pensive quietness between ; the venerable woods ; rivers that move in majesty, and the complaining brooks that make the meadows green ; and, poured round all, old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste—are but the solemn decorations all of the great tomb of man."

I will concede that this fragment of Bryant's *Thanatopsis* loses something through being printed in the above form—but who will deny that the stately march of the pentameters remains ? who would not feel the grandeur that breathes through every line and every word ? who would not know, without the necessity of being informed, that this is poetry ? More than that ! if one came across this passage, would one not know almost instinctively that it was not at home in the plebeian dress of prose ? that it cried out to be printed in the usual manner of poetry, with the metrical divisions that have indicated themselves so strongly ? But if, on the other hand, one encountered the selections by Frost, Eliot or Benet in their prose typography, would one have even the faintest intimation that they could or should be printed in any other form ? And is this not the test ? If a passage does not survive as poetry after its transposition into prose form, what right has it to be known as poetry ? And if it does so survive, has it not amply proved its claim ?

Let us consider another example, merely by way of assuring ourselves that the selection from Bryant is by no means unique in the effect it gives. Every reader of Tennyson will recognise the following :

"Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white ; nor waves the cypress in the palace walk ; nor winks the gold fin in the porphry font : the firefly wakens : waken thou with me.

"Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost, and like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

"Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars, and all thy heart lies open unto me.

"Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves a shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

"Now folds the lily all her sweetness up, and slips into the bosom of the lake: so fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip into my bosom and be lost in me."

Again the poem loses something—loses much, in fact—through its appearance in the vestments of prose. But the mere fact that it does lose, and that it seems out of place in its prose clothing, is evidence that it is poetry, and deserves even if it does not actually demand a different physical garb. Yet whether it is labelled poetry or not the reader cannot help knowing that it is poetry; while, in the case of Eliot, Frost, Benet and their kind, the label is the *sine non qua,* the all in all, the ultimate. Stripped of the clothing of poetry—which is to say, stripped of the conventional typographical arrangement of poetry—they are indeed naked. No! they are worse than naked; for it will be seen that they have no skin or heart or bones beneath, but are mere ghosts that wither and vanish at the first touch of the exposing light. What they have actually done is to achieve a very simple—an elementary—form of camouflage. As an illustration, let me repeat the first lines of this paragraph:

Again the poem loses something—loses much, in fact—
Through its appearance in the vestments of prose.
But the mere fact that it does lose,
And that it seems out of place in its prose clothing,
Is evidence that it is poetry,
And deserves even if it does not actually demand
A different physical garb.

Nothing is further from my mind than to suggest that there is anything poetic about this passage. Yet I do maintain, without any self-flattery whatever, that when printed in the above form it is quite as poetic as many ebullitions of the moderns. And I would suggest that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we may suppose many modern "poems" to have been written first in the form of prose and then divided into lines according to taste. For, whether or not this was the procedure followed, their poetic merits are solely of a typographical nature. If their authors were forced to adopt the prose typography, they would be safe from any possibility of being regarded as poets. And, as a result, much of the confusion that perturbs the present-day world of poetry would vanish, and we would cease to bestow the wreaths and laurels of the Muses upon men and women little more accomplished in song than the writer of the average business letter. STANTON A. COBLENTZ.

[Our distinguished contributor may be regarded as the doyen of American critics. He has been a book reviewer on the *New York Times, Sun, Herald, The Internat. Book Review, Bookman,* etc.; he was the winner of the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Peace Poem Contest in 1918, and THE POETRY REVIEW's Star Poem Contest, 1924; he has published several vols. of verse and criticism and essays, and has edited several anthologies, including *Modern American Lyrics* and *Modern British Lyrics.* His "Decline of the Grand Manner" in the January, 1943, POETRY REVIEW was widely appreciated.]

In these days when sorrow dogs our footsteps and anxiety stabs our hearts, it is now that we turn for solace to the things of the spirit. As for myself, I cannot overestimate the abiding joy and solace which I have found within the pages of THE POETRY REVIEW. Therefore, it is with a grateful heart that I am renewing my membership subscription, with the wish that it may brighten the lives of its readers for countless years to come: ELIZABETH HOWE HARRIS, San Francisco, February 8th.

THIS DEATH I DIED

A SLIPPING into sleep with folded hands;
A quiet failing of the last least breath—
So gently life may lay aside its bands.
This death I died was not a little death.

This death I died was not a simple thing—
A smooth translation on a sliding stream.
This was an agonising sundering;
A lost self in the dark without a dream.

But now I move among the obedient dead,
Who in their gentle joy are ever young.
Purged of my living, I may lift my head,
And speak with their serene and certain tongue.

MURIEL GRAINGER.

HIGH TREASURE

IF, with too eager grasp,
high treasure I plunder,
It will hang, bereft, in my clasp,
of its wonder.

If a holy thought
I cheapen in easy rhyme,
It will be with grievous loss fraught
for all time.

Far better to wait
like a child whose hap
Is to find a magic spray late—
dropped in her lap.

Better the thought drift
down within my reach,
To clothe itself with the swift
delight of speech.

JANE SCOTT PARSONS.

TO LABOUR IS TO PRAY

GRIM, spiritless, as old, old men you toil,
You prisoners of war on British soil—
Patrolling, seried, bitter, row and row,
With listless steps and outflung hand you sow
The seeds of barley, oats and golden corn,
The harvest of the future yet unborn.

Oh, sow with gentleness, you men of war,
To "Labour is to pray"—make this your law—
And as you plod from dawn to set of sun,
Think of the morrow, when the strife is done,
Then your petitions to our Mother Earth
Will ease the labour of a world's re-birth.

AURIOL GRAYSON.

THE LAST OF THE BARDS

(Some Notes on Herbert Edward Palmer)

A RUSHING, mighty wind sweeps down from the moorlands and sends the flimsy *salon* curtains whirling inwards—dishevelling the fragile *decor,* splintering into a thousand fragments a precious *objet d'art* and scattering the stale smoke and ash of last night's two hundred and twenty-two cigarettes. At such a time the stout of heart lean back, dilate their nostrils and breathe, deeply. The weaklings leap to shut the windows.

This, it seems to me, is as good a way as any to describe both the wholesome rebirth of poetry now evident, and the impact of Herbert Edward Palmer's melodious and fiery verses. And with how real a sense of relief we turn from the latest *dementia praecox* of the latest sixteen-year-old poetic prodigy ("printed on the *very* latest kind of inferior toilet-paper, my dear!") to such a lusty, wide mouthed, indefatigable, incorrigible and incorruptible veteran poet-critic as this Civil List veteran, who has written not only the intensest five hundred pages of verse to be found in the poetic literature of *any* country in the world, but also that encyclopaedic *history* of English twentieth century poetry that has become a textbook to the discerning. A very mine of valuable information, and a monument of critical percipience, Herbert Palmer's *Post-Victorian Poetry* will easily outlast the slick and mannered "smart-alec" criteria of much present-day critical *blague.*

This veteran troubadour's first book of poems (he has published fifteen volumes of verse, including "collected" and "selected" poems) sold very slowly, but it drew the praise of the highest. "AE" (George Russell), W. H. Davies and Bridges, the Laureate, became, in time, his fast and intimate friends. This first book, *Two Fishers,* was published in the spring of 1918, six months before the Armistice. Otherwise I doubt whether "Q" would have included Palmer in his *Oxford Book of English Verse,* for he closed his revision with poets who had published their first book *before* the Armistice—with the exception of those who were already dead, like Wilfred Owen, but whose MSS. were in the hands of friends. But Herbert Palmer had already published a number of poems in periodicals, such as *Country Life* and *The English Review* (between 1910 and 1918). Indeed, his pristine appearance in *Leeds Mercury Supplement* took place at the end of the last century, during the period of the Yellow Nineties; but these very experimental first-poems have not since been reprinted.

The books of poems of his which are still in print are: *Collected Poems* (1918-31); *Summit and Chasm* (1933); *The Vampire* (1936); *The Gallows Cross* (1940); and *Cinder Thursday* (1931); all published by Dent, with the exception of the last-named, to which Benn still sticks. Then there is a small selection in an Augustan booklet (1931), and a larger selection called *Season and Festival,* which was recently published by Faber in the Sesame series: and there is an almost complete bibliography of Palmer's works published at the beginning of this latest book. In the opinion of the present writer *Cinder Thursday* is the least remarkable, least interesting of Palmer's writings, and by its open and (I make bold to say) *not* very deft flouting of T. S. Eliot and certain *coteries* he undoubtedly aroused antagonism, and did himself a certain amount of harm. *Cinder Thursday* was an angry mixture of parody, satire, mockery and passion, but it was true *in substance,* and did make rather a strong plea for progressive individualism and the courage of independent effort.

Herbert Edward Palmer's chief beneficent symbol—since many lay great store upon such matters—is the Sun. If one might judge by his present writings and critical appraisals of some of the younger generation of poets, he would, it seems, like the term "a sun poet" associated with his name. Some of my readers will doubtless recall that fine Ode to the Sun entitled "Prayer for Sunlight in early Spring," which

appeared in the pages of *The New Statesman,* and certain significant lines from the poem "The Fiddler and the Girl"

> That I should sing of you 'neath sun or star,
> You the Sun's flag ; for I kneel down to the Sun
> And the whole curving radiance of blue sky,
> That breadth that holds all Wonder and pure Reason.

Wonder and pure Reason ! There you have it—the measure of his vibrant poetic quality. And again :

> I can do nothing save respond and follow
> As the Earth follows the Sun, yet does not follow—
> Its worn face tilting to the fiery radiance—
> Swinging around in the wide severing void.

This interesting poet—completely in character, as so few people are in this standardised and mass-produced age—has declared, often enough, that the Moon is a sinister symbol for him, but I do not feel this to be quite always the case, though in a "Denunciatory Ode," he cries :

> As I was moorwards faring
> I was aware of eyes—
> A wrinkled visage staring
> From out December skies—
> The Moon, an astral shilling,
> Her silvern radiance spilling
> Like mammon light in darkness
> Along the moorland rise.
>
> I know thee, ghastly symbol,
> How once on sulphurous morn
> When skies swung harp and timbrel
> Thou wast conceived and born—
> God's sign of slow damnation ;
> Drear whirling desolation !
> I have discerned His meaning,
> And render Fate my scorn.
>
> Cold coin, I do abhor thee,
> And shake with wrath and fear !
> Let mortal men adore thee,
> Thou hast no minstrel here.
> From thee my soul shall sever,
> Come joy, come woe, for ever.
> I will make clean my mansion
> From thine enchantments drear.
>
> I cry for sun and morning,
> And lengthened days of June.
> I wound my heart with scorning
> This last insovent boon.
> Avaunt, pale night and Winter
> Ere sun and star shall splinter,
> And we made one in madness
> Do howl beneath the moon !

Too violent and bare-fisted, perhaps ; and illustrating his corroding faults no less than his wood-spinning virtues, but again, in a nobler accent, he cries, in another poem :

> Now are the days of darkness upon men,
> There is no certainty in things done,
> And the moon, a buckler of desolation,
> Is a seduction unto the sun.
> The stars fight in the lunar spaces ;
> The gnarled waves devour their sea.
> Come unto Me all ye that are heavy laden,
> Come unto Me.

That Palmer is a religious poet and a Christian poet is abundantly, overwhelmingly clear. *The Listener* once wrote of him, "No poet writing to-day has quite the same kind of religious strength." But oddly enough, Lord David Cecil omitted Herbert Palmer from his *Oxford Book of Christian Verse.* It is, however, not altogether inconceivable that Lord David may have merely overlooked him, or known him not well enough, for Palmer is by no means the only "Christian" poet left out of that fine

anthology. Such authentic "Christian" poets as Gilbert Thomas, Edward Thompson and Roland Childe (to choose but a few among living poets) are all conspicuous by their absence from these pages. Nor is it inconceivable either that many, almost too many, anarchic pagan or semi-pagan elements in his writings prevented Palmer's inclusion in that book. But in the present writer's opinion, besides being a religious and Christian poet, Herbert Palmer is also a love poet.

One is delighted to encounter, strewn like flowers across the body of his work, now here, now there, the sudden glow of a love-lyric, and delighted the more to find it a flower "that never pretends"! Seeing these freaks of beauty one does not exclaim, "Few—but roses," but rather, "All too few—and every one a *flower*"! If the love poems of the grave and scholarly Bridges are more fine-spun (for Bridges was an "aesthete" in the true sense of that contentious word) and the love poems of the aged Hardy more silly-sooth and aerial than these flowers-o'-the-field and the hedgerow that twinkle in Palmer's country nosegay, we accept the difference of texture and bloom and hue all the more gratefully, knowing as we do that one flower differeth from another (as do the stars) in glory! But listen to this:

> Her eyes—I never knew their hue—
> Drowsed, smouldering, in the burning dusk.
> And somewhere out of the earth's view
> A planet sang, and the air breathed musk.

Herbert Palmer is also a frequent nature poet—but nature with broad horizons. There is not much pastoral detail to be found in his nature poems, but how exquisite and unusually logical is their presentation.

In this age of "poetic unreason" a logical poet like Palmer comes as something of a surprise, pleasant for some, unpleasant for others. Palmer is always very *logical*. When at the University I understand he made considerable study of what is known as Logic or Dialectics. And his verse, if anarchic, is surely logical in each poem—although one inspiration of logic may appear to contradict another.

My readers will, I trust, forgive me for two things: (1) for the use of an unoriginal title for this article; (2) for the use of *labels*—a convenient fashion that is a very ready help to the reader and writer alike, but abhorred of some purists. A friend pointed out to me, after I had begun this article, that one prominent review about Palmer was headed by exactly the same words! To the labels I have already used I must add just one more, a war poet. This last is a label for which I have little liking, but it serves a useful purpose to-day, especially in regard to this particular poet. Herbert Palmer has published many "war poems" dealing with *this* war, war in general, the last war, the aftermath of the last war (including a prophecy after the last war of another war to come)—in all, from eighty to a hundred pages—most of which have been omitted from his Sesame book. I imagine that Faber must have rejected all Palmer's down-right war poems—though when a complete survey is taken of all his war poems written between the years 1914-1944 it may perhaps be discovered that Herbert Palmer is the only complete war poet of these years. Nor does it seem to me true, what many believe and say, that Palmer has only written about timeless matters and matters remote from this age. It will be remembered that this poet was *blamed* for his acute social consciousness during the Georgian era. Surely this poet has written many poems of the age and for the age—not everything outside it. The question that poses itself is why then has he been styled *bard*, and "The Last of the Bards"? Like his own "David" in that most memorable of his shorter poems, "David and Goliath," I see this most valiant figure "all at odds" in the modern camp of the Philistines. In vain they wave their dreadful spears. David won.

See Goliath, mark his height!
What turns David on his might?
Valour lissom as a prayer
Running tiptoe up God's stair.

It will be no surprise to any true lover or maker of poetry (whether he belong to The Poetry Society or not) when I assert that nearly all Palmer's poems were written for the *Voice*. Nor will the discerning disagree with my statement that this poet has rarely written anything unless he felt the act to be *inevitable*.

It is difficult to assess Herbert Palmer's present position and fantastic to prophesy his future place in the poetic hierarchy. That he stands solitary and that he stands alone are alike remarkable: and one more than suspects that he was fashioned in the heroic mould and proportions of an ampler poetic day than the present. Comparison with such surging spirits as Dean Swift, John Bunyan, Villon, Dunbar, Blake, John Davidson, Cynewulf the Saxon, the Old Border Balladists, Isaiah,, and even D. H. Lawrence come crowding to memory; and one is tempted to wonder just to what extent the "Georgian" movement was responsible for Herbert Palmer's neglect. Certainly his opposition *in the first instance* to the Georgian "revolt" is too well-known a matter of literary history to be lightly forgotten, and was doubtless largely inspired by his annoyance at Squire's parodies of Masefield. Neither does one easily forget that the Georgian movement was at one time a very formidable literary group! And it is to his credit that Palmer often praised those Georgian poets where merit justly deserved that praise.

In the matter of "resemblances" it would seem that the chief stress has been on Blake and the Old Testament prophets; and, crossing that, it has been recognised that Palmer sometimes has Villon's natural voice. But be that as it may, I have discovered that this disturbing and most interesting poet is not himself conscious of any influences at all! For myself, I cannot help feeling that at least two poets of this century have influenced his writings, and I am sure neither the dead Flecker nor the living Masefield would disdain the tribute.

Palmer's friend, the poet Humbert Wolfe, in a review in the *Saturday Westminster*, expressed the opinion that Palmer seemed anarchic, because of these differences of comparison. It is more than likely that Herbert Palmer is indeed England's only wholesome literary anarchist. But resemblances were also recognised between these two brother poets, due, in part, I dare say, to their both having read Heine in the original. Their *tapestries*, however, were different in this—that whereas Humbert worked in wool, Herbert used *silk*. So wrote a friend, at the time. But he forgot to add that Herbert Palmer intertwines copper-wire with some of that silk. There was a painful period in their lives when these two poets stood opposed in rivalry: for just when Palmer appeared to come into his own, Wolfe seemed to steal his laurels. Wolfe called his first notable book of poems *The Unknown Goddess*—presumably, after Palmer's *The Unknown Warrior*. Yet, later on, when all the critics turned against Wolfe, Palmer went over to his side. Strictly speaking, Wolfe was not a life-long friend, for Palmer first became aware of his presence sometime in the year 1922, and these two poets met for the first time in 1933. Shortly before his death Humbert Wolfe told Palmer that he was the only literary friend (save, of course, the Garvins) left to him.

Palmer's most extraordinary poem is his long rhapsody, "The Wolf Knight," which drew astonishment from Yeats. (I have had the privilege of reading the letter which Yeats wrote with his quill to Herbert Palmer about this poem.) Composed in the year 1921, during a period when he was in a state of semi-trance, it prophesied

the coming of the Swastika, and contains some of his most passionate and metrically perfect and energetic passages. But it borders on delirium, and some of it is indeed downright delirium. But the long ballad, "Two Foemen," is nearly its equal, and is equally inspired. Some critics are of the opinion that Palmer's best long poem is the justly-famous "Song of Job and Solomon," while yet others have reserved that praise for his "Jonah Comes to Nineveh" and for "The Offspring of Heaven and Hell." Palmer has written many long poems—tales and allegories which should be collected into a single book that would occupy, I suppose, some one hundred pages. To these I think a wise publisher might very profitably add his short verse-parables and fables.

Mr. Palmer will, I feel sure, not quarrel with me when I say that his poetry, speaking generally, presents a certain unfastidious, rough-hewn and (at times) uneven appearance; but at least one is conscious that his material is solid and massive and durable. He is never the *boudoir* poet and those honest fingers will have no traffic whatever with *papier-maché*. Sometimes, too, with the superb naïvety and shall we say *innocence* of a strange genius, he strings the *very* different-lustered pearls of noble diction and homely sentiment upon the self-same thread! Lapidarian skill and consummate artistry he will not push to the front, not because he lacks these good gifts, but simply because, in his puritanical zeal and over-scrupulous honesty he has a semi-religious distrust (I had almost written disdain) of such things, in the case of his own poetry. But this house of poetry that he has built has many mansions and is not for Time's throwing. And if I confess that I am more "at home" in one of the smaller rooms downstairs, where there are Aunt Zillahs and Christmas trees and the dancing feet of children (or even outside in the garden, where there are elves and fairies, currant bushes and gooseberry trees—and even gooseberry pie!—and hooked sticks and laughing ferns and talking waters, and snows and frosts, and ghosts and tramps and waits and outlaws and out-of-works, and bows-and-arrows and orchestras and barrel-organs and bugle songs and banjo songs), that does not mean I do not find the courage to climb his ascending stairs, and time and time again discover this celestial scavenger in his top-most garret, leaning out of the crooked window, rubbing shoulders with the old Hebrew prophets, and talking with God.

ARNOLD VINCENT BOWEN.

LAPIDARY

NOW you are gone and I am free
I am a miser of my dreams,
a silent, sad lapidary
who sees no sun but dust in beams.

The silver seconds of our joy
slipped through the narrow neck of time,
and you have but a sad ghost-boy
and I a wraith to match my mime.

A valiant fleet of schemes had we
to dare fate's dim armada, and,
when all is told, such ecstacy
in little things—in touch of hand—

But now you're gone and I am free.
The blame is mine; I hoard my dreams,
a silent, sad lapidary
who sees no sun but dust in beams.

GEOFFREY MOORE.

GLORIA CRUCIS

PERHAPS the cross alone can keep men held
Above the turmoil of a futile world;
If only crucifixion's pain can break
The heart that screens a Host, drive home the nails.

If that is man's appointed place, endow
Thy Church with strength and grace to occupy
The cross, till Shiloh come and take her down
With loving hands and tender words of praise.

Paymaster-Commander, R.N. GRESWOLDE DAVIS.

RINGING BELLS

EACH voice becomes a thousand bells
Ringing—ever ringing . . . . .
Over hills and dales
Great tongues voice aloud
The weeping people.
Each bell echoes in a steeple . . . . .
The world the steeple:
The bell the people:
Spire tips probe the leadened sky
They are but the people's eyes.
And so with voice and eyes awake
Both await the dawn to break.
Watch and ring, watch and ring
The Continent will rise and sing!

R. YVONNE KENT.

TO F.J.M.

WHAT had I not accomplished ere this hour
If I had known you when my life began!
My barren years would then have borne their flower
And fruitfulness had crowned their youthful span.
For when your influence with its quickening power
Across my mind like summer sunshine ran,
Its latencies, asleep until that hour,
Their germination at its touch began.

If, therefore, ripeness should its gift bestow
Upon the fruit now green and immature,
So that the hungry some slight pleasure know
In tasting of that ripeness, I adjure
Them solemnly that ere their feast is done
They breathe a blessing on the kindly sun! ERIC VAN HAGEN.

NOTE.—The subject of this sonnet has been my mentor and friend for the past ten years and my literary critic for the past six. His standards are very high, and very rarely do I send any work out without his approval. In the few instances in which I went contrary to his advice I have met with no success.—E.V.H.

MORE COMMENTS ON T. S. ELIOT

BY now we have flogged Mr. Eliot almost to death with divers and contradictory criticism and maybe he has had many a private smile over some of our analyses. Penguin, *New Writing, Poetry* (London), *Scrutiny, Life and Letters*, all have raised a provocative voice, and unless one day he publishes a statement that (*a*) he does or does not care a fig for politics; (*b*) that there has or has not been any stirring political influence behind his poems; (*c*) that with the much-quoted words, "At the still point of the turning world," etc., he had in mind love or death or indeed any specific meaning attributed to them, or rather that he has struck beyond these to the core of consciousness which is at their root: a raid, indeed, on the inarticulate; (*d*) that this was conscious hard thinking, or words coming into the brain in a silent moment; (*e*) just how much he was influenced by any one religion; then there will be petty controversy till Kingdom Come.

E. M. Stephenson has kept away from this dangerous battleground and I will not presume to enter her territory. She speaks neither for nor against. Her job has been to elucidate and to analyse; she "can dissect the component parts of his method and show how it works," she gives us the "main guides to this poet's work." But surely there is a middle path between her able and scholarly programme-notes and the ismatic dissertations which have been offered elsewhere?

In agreeing that "Mr. Eliot is a poet, not a political pamphleteer," I join in the general discussion and answer not E. M. Stephenson, but all those who ride their own particular aesthetic hobby-horses. It is the poetry, more than the motive, that matters. It is more important that we should assess the poetry and understand the mind that made it, than that we should claim meanings aud solutions, be they political or religious, where, maybe, nothing specific was intended.

What, then, can we say about the poetry, as such?—First impressions should not always be trusted, but here are my own:

If form itself—the strict arrangement of lines and rhymes—is not part of our brain, then the poetry we write needs a much sharper ? to bind it together. This may be the swing and follow-through of blank verse; or it may be the ability to throw on the screen vivid informal pictures. Mr. Eliot relies for his force and power, not on a closely-welded structure enclosing richly compressed thought, but on things sharply seen, sharply told.

He apprehends abstractions, not with vision, but with the senses of the mind and spirit. Thus, he, himself, may have deep experiences; but they are felt and not seen and he cannot pass them on to us as he can the clear-cut vision seen in reality or in the mind's eye.

[(?)=sharper focus? closer continuity? I leave it to the imagination, the critical understanding of the reader.]

It is dramatic necessity which binds together "Murder in the Cathedral"; this being lacking, Mr. Eliot's thought is not sharply enough focussed. He has got his ideas on to paper before the flux of his thought has set and integrated.

> Lord, the Roman hyacinths are blowing in bowls, and
> The winter sun creeps by the snow hills.

Here are words striding through the brain; words which came to him unbidden and needed no alteration. Now words no longer stride, they meander.

And of "Burnt Norton," *et seq.*

This may be deeply considered thought, a striving toward philosophy: but is it poetry?

It seems to me there is some affinity between all this disconnected comment. First, consider a poet's needs, the material he must use, the limitations he must accept.

Unlike prose, which has no laws except finished coherence, poetry prospers through the limitations of strict form. Indeed, form is not an artifice and a superficiality; it is a psychological necessity, and poetry which has not some recognisable structure, be it formal or informal, will come apart like a badly-made blancmange. Mr. Eliot seldom confines himself to literary formalities; he paints vivid pictures, or he uses *leit-motiv* (indeed, his debt to music is great, and more could be said thereon); whether or no these methods are successful depends on the tenseness and certainty of his thought, the sharpness and strength of his ideas.

Thus, to my mind, the early poetry is living verse, where the later seldom is.

The word-pictures are obvious, and most vivid in the early poetry: remember "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and "The Coming of the Magi." *Leit-motiv* he uses as early as "Portrait of a Lady" ("I shall sit here, serving tea to friends," etc., "Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance") and "Prufrock"; it re-appears again in "Ash Wednesday" and "Murder in the Cathedral" ("Let the wheel turn"), to be used with startling dramatic power in "The Rock":

> In this land
> There shall be one cigarette to two men,
> To two women one half-pint of bitter
> Ale . . . . .

These words, significant enough in themselves, gain startling effectiveness resounding (off-stage) as they do after the cumulative denunciation of "an age which advances progressively backwards." We see it again in "Burnt Norton," "Dry Salvages," "East Coker" and "Little Gidding," where it is used not only within each separate poem, but as a connecting-link to bind them together, to indicate the continuity of his meditation.

> All shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well

recurs again and again in "Little Gidding."

> Quick now, here now, always

is used at the end of both "Little Gidding" and "Burnt Norton." I will not be so tedious as to catalogue any more examples; the reader will remember or discover the rest without my assistance.

The fault, to my mind, of Mr. Eliot's recent work is that he is no longer seeing things clearly. He is groping now after truth, where once he so clearly exposed falsities. ". . . . . whether or no these methods are successful . . . . . ;" his methods have not changed, but he is no longer certain; the texture has been pulled out, the threads have been extended and much of the poetry degenerates into prose. These last poems have many virtues; there is much delicate imagery; and they contain some of the most moving lines of this last decade and some penetrating comment on the use of words. The weakness is not in the method, the structure, but in the attitude of mind. It is dangerous to prophesy; but I hopefully surmise that this may prove to be a period of transition, unimportant save as a bridge between the vital early and late.

M. D. HASTINGS.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Granville Proby, literary executor of the late Mrs. Tyndall, who survived her distinguished husband for fifty years, The Poetry Society's library has been enriched by the gift of the poetry residue of the late Professor Tyndall's library. The great Victorian scientist was very much interested in poetry and bought a good deal and also received gifts from authors, from the 1850's to his death in 1893, much being minor poetry, long forgotten, but of interest to the student and because of the origins and associations of the collection.

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

THE first question that poses itself in first coming into contact with Gerard Manley Hopkins's work is how much of his defiance of normality in the use of words is intentional and how much due to an unbalanced, emotional tensity in the writer ? I incline to think it is due mainly to the latter and that Hopkins consistently strove to reduce himself to intelligibility, differing thus from his imitators, whose efforts are in the opposite direction.

Hopkins is never really unintelligible, only difficult, I conclude, after a study of his key poems. I think he regretted that difficulty, as any artist must, and probably felt a sense of frustration at a failure to be at once intense and simple, which would have placed him so much higher in the world of poetry. Much of his work seems to show a mind unbalanced and strained, by what I do not know, but if he were a Jesuit priest it is probable that enforced celibacy, in the case of a man who was also a poet, was the cause. There must be some strong reason for this nervous, explosive energy, this almost sublime violence, which appears not to relieve the internal pressure, although it pours and gushes so that words jostle and slip by in a disorderly order which strains both the eye and the mind.

So I think of him as a celibate man and a celibate poet, founding neither a family nor a school, but doomed to uniqueness as a literary curiosity of a rare and often beautiful quality, an opinion not coloured by any acquaintance with the man or his many commentators.

I do not think he found our language inadequate for his expression. He is not an example for this modernist argument. I think he was inadequately equipped to control his own utterance without robbing it of its urgency and strength. Controlled in so many other directions in self-expression, he was uncontrolled in this, hanging on with difficulty to coherency and effectually burying much of his own emotional power in obscurity. If you have to dig for emotion you lose it and this is often his reader's fate.

Why is Hopkins so interesting ? Paradoxically, because he is difficult, I think. Yet his difficulty has little to do with profundity or depth of vision, but to a genius for recognition of the inherent beauty of words in a pictorial sense and for their qualitites of sound. Add that he is an impressionist with them, splashing them on to his canvas with an elemental vigour which nearly overwhelms us, and you have his secret—the subtle secret of the patina which quite successfully conceals the flatnesses and weaknesses which are common enough in his work. The line often quoted to me, the "bright and battering sandal" one, is not above criticism. It is a fine line, but "bright" is inaccurate and sandal merely rhymes with Randall, the smith's name, which I assume to be a genuine name and not one chosen to arrange for the last coruscating line. Is there not here a worship of word sounds too deep for purely sincere utterance. Take "Andromeda" and regard "her flower, her piece of being." Here you have a dreadfully stilted description of a very common matter, a female body. "Flower" is a piece of ascetic nonsense and "her piece of being" an unrelieved flatitude, if I might coin a word. I take these things at random, there are plenty to choose from.

I must not be understood to decry him however. There is plenty of evidence of a weird and twisted genius. How far such a being can affect our literature is, I think, less obvious. We can accept and admire, but emulate at our peril. We have not the repressed intensity, the capacity for sublimating every desire and aspiration into words, which gives him such power and subtlety in the nuances of expression. In spite of this, however, I believe his influence must be negligible upon a race of men

who have an instinctive and quite healthy repulsion from anything psychologically warped.

In reading these poems I have been irresistibly and constantly reminded of the old saw about not seeing the wood for the trees. Hopkins's trees, his words, are so varied and so beautiful that the wood is scarcely discernible. When we see it, alas, it is neither very vast nor very deep nor very mysterious. Not one of the great poets I say, but unusual and assuredly no charlatan nor even an experimenter; a tortured soul rather, who did his best in complete sincerity and came, sometimes, quite near to immortality. I am inspired by him to offer a sonnet to his memory:

What cold, bleak balm, what stern emollient,
For flesh a-quiver in a priestly gin,
Were words to you? Who, walled and moated in
By ghostly hands, could burst from prisonment
Not to be free but, in a chasm pent,
Sing like a flood-full cataract wherein
A rainbow jewelled each indiscipline
And music found an untamed instrument.
Green, fertile valleys vainly beckoned you,
Close to your heart their treason muttering,
Where in stark uplands swift wind-hovers flew,
Their flight a song of vision's uttering;
Which, on your ferment, magic rhythms threw
Of shadow wing-beats fiercely fluttering.

H. W. HARDING.

TWENTY GUINEAS FOR A SONNET

The Poetry Society announce the offer, by a recent POETRY REVIEW sonneteer, of twenty guineas for the best unpublished sonnet in the Petrarchan form, submitted in open competition by May 30th, 1944. The competition will be judged by Lord Alfred Douglas, who has made a particular cult of the sonnet. Lord Alfred, in his recent address before the Royal Society of Literature, said, "The sonnet seems to me the highest form of English verse. It is indeed the very quintessence of form, and a poet who has really mastered it has nothing more to learn in the technique of English verse. Unfortunately, its rules are not always strictly observed nor even generally accepted, but I have always used what I conceive to be the correct Petrarchan form, with two rhymes only in the octave arranged A B B A A B B A, and two or three rhymes in the sestet arranged either CDE, CDE, or CD, CD, CD. It is not an easy medium to master and even great poets like Keats show that they have sometimes been controlled by the rhyme-scheme instead of themselves controlling it, while Rossetti is often careless or slovenly in his rhyming. But a perfect Petrarchan sonnet is, to my mind, from the point of view of form, the greatest thing in English verse."

The Poetry Society shall become the owner of the copyright of the winning sonnet and may publish any of the other sonnets recommended by the adjudicator.

Any competitor submitting more than one sonnet shall be disqualified.

Each sonnet must bear name and address of the author, but *noms-de-plume* may be used if the name and address of the author are enclosed in separate envelope endorsed with the *nom-de-plume*. The decision of the judge shall be final.

The MS. and a stamped self-addressed envelope must be securely fastened together and addressed "Sonnet Competition, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1."

[We regret that by one of those perverse printers' errors that turn one word into another that is not obviously a "literal" the name KEATS appeared as Yeats (who was no sonneteer) in our quotation from Lord Alfred's definition of the Petrarchan form in our last issue.]

A NEW INTERPRETATION OF COLERIDGE'S "RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

COLERIDGE says (Chap. 22, *Biographia Literaria*) that if a philosophical writer desires to improve his readers' morals, he would pursue it "more appropriately and with far greater probability of success, in sermons than in an elevated poem." Yet, as I will show, he ignored this, his own advice, by writing "The Mariner." He wrote that poem in 1798, with the intention (as he says in Chap. 14, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817) that his "endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic," but I submit his subject ran away with him, and that many years later, he *unconsciously* admitted it, for he said (Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, 1835) the poem "ought to have had no more *moral* than a certain tale in *The Arabian Nights*, whereas it had too much," and I will now show it is a *poetical sermon*, that commences with a parable and concludes with its application, its "moral," and therefore, justifies itself in its own sphere, despite its author's belated stricture of his own work.

Thus, it seems Coleridge no more knew the purport of what he had written in "The Mariner" than he did in "Kubla Khan," which is almost entirely concerned with "The Old Man of the Mountain," Aloadine. His critics have been in like case concerning the former; none have recognised it as a sermon, probably, for the following reasons: the poet acted against his own view, as above quoted; they have accepted his statement of his intentions as a specification of his performance; they have been so engrossed with the account of what happened during the voyage that they have failed to see its importance is not as a story, but in its effect on the Wedding Guest; finally, they have been overawed by Wordsworth's well-known criticisms, as given in the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, 1800.

Wordsworth, initially, was co-author of the poem, but the very evening it was started the views of the collaborators were found to differ so greatly that he retired from it, after contributing some of the ideas on which Coleridge afterwards worked and four of the actual lines of the poem.

Three years later, Wordsworth claimed credit for obtaining the poem's inclusion in the Lyrical Ballads, but charged it with having four great defects, which I will now enumerate, with a view to disproving them by reasons not hitherto advanced.

(1) "the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of mariner or as a human being, who, having been long under the control of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural."

It seems maintainable that the Mariner has great personality "as a human being," and that all readers of the poem can, and do, form their own picture of him, and place him in their mental albums along with Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe, etc. That he is no ordinary mariner is true, for he is one of the prophets, as I shall show.

As regards the latter part of the criticism, the Mariner "holds him with his glittering eye" and thereby holds his listener "spellbound" and renders him as helpless as "a three years child," which power might be attributed to the supernatural. After the sinking of the ship, when the Mariner had found himself "Within the pilot's boat," he merely moved his lips, upon which "the pilot shriek'd," "The holy Hermit—pray'd," and the pilot's boy went crazy and said "The *Devil* knows how to row," from all of which it is clear his appearance must have become extremely uncanny, in fact "supernatural," as the result of his tribulations.

(2) "he does not act, but is continually acted upon."

Had he done nothing but shoot the albatross, the Mariner would, by that act, have motivated the entire poem, but, besides, from first line to last, he holds in thrall

the Wedding Guest. Thus, of the two participants, it is the Wedding Guest who is continually acted upon and the Mariner who is the actor.

(3) "the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other."

The "crime" (the shooting of the albatross) produces the punishment, the usual and poetical sequence, and the Mariner's recital of his act and its consequences quite logically "produces" a sadder and wiser Wedding Guest. Thus, looking at the poem as a whole and not limiting attention to the sailor's narrative, there is perfect cause and effect.

(4) "the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated."

That is a matter of opinion on which no fixed judgment is obtainable. It seems Coleridge overworked himself in bringing close before his readers' eyes so many wonderful pictures! That a great mind wore itself away to make the world brighter! Apparently, Wordsworth would have preferred something more impressionistic and yet, two of the four notable lines he contributed to the poem are :

> And thou art long, and lank, and brown
> As is the ribb'd sea-sand,

so it may be smilingly declared that he himself "laboriously" *capped* the descriptive pile, for he added these lines after the poem had informed us the Mariner was "ancient," had a "long grey beard and glittering eye" and "skinny hand."

It is interesting to note Coleridge's tu quoque in *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter 22) that

> "the second defect in his (Wordsworth's) poems is a *laborious* minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects . . ."

although I imagine it to be quite unintentional.

In the same volume as that in which "The Mariner" was first published appeared a new poem of Wordsworth's, written three years after Coleridge had written "The Mariner." It is called "Hart-Leap Well," and I call attention to the identity of its moral with that of Coleridge's poem, and to the fact that both poems spring from a similar act, the wanton killing of a creature.

After the Mariner had repented of shooting the albatross, he says (the antepenultimate verse of the poem)

> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and *small* ;

Wordsworth's poem ends

> One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
> Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the *meanest* thing that feels.

The Mariner says

> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

and Wordsworth

> The Being, that is in the clouds and air,
> Maintains a deep and reverential care
> For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

It is not by way of flattery that Wordsworth thus intrudes on the subject his friend had made his own, or he would not, in the same volume, have been so critical. If, as apparently is the case, the idea was to show how the theme should be treated; to make it obvious why he retired from "The Mariner"; to challenge comparison; then, I submit, he would have been wiser to have left his poem unwritten, for, apart from anything else, its moral is illogical.

"Sir Walter" killed the hart and the Mariner shot the albatross. Both acts are treated by the respective poets as crimes, but whereas, as the result of his act the Mariner receives punishment, Sir Walter, for killing the hart, obtains pleasure for the rest of his life, and moreover, after his death, which should have closed the incident, rather than have started it, "Nature" makes all around the spot where the hart died temporarily decay.

To again give our undivided attention to "The Mariner." The account of the voyage is ancillary to "the moral," according to which, the heavenly powers value the life of an albatross as equal to that of a man. The Mariner himself was created to commit the crime (as it is termed in the gloss to Part 2, verse 4) which afforded the opportunity for establishing that moral. Whatever in the poem is "supernatural" is not so in a "romantic" sense, that is, of a character that arouses pleasant and excited interest, but in a religious or ethical, and therefore, sobering sense, such as is to be met with constantly in books appertaining to religions. In his Latin preface to the poem, Coleridge quotes "I can readily believe there are more invisible than visible natural systems in the universe . . ." and "I do not deny that it is advantageous sometimes to turn one's thoughts to the conception . . . of a bigger and *better* world." It seems that his thoughts turned subconsciously in the direction I have italicized as soon as he started on the poem, and that thereafter the romantic and supernatural were dominated by the religious and ethical—

> That not in fancy's maze he wandered long
> But stoop'd to truth and moraliz'd his song.

Truly it can be said of Coleridge that he, pre-eminently, was an instrument in the hands of his Maker. There seems to have been another mind than his own at work in "Kubla Khan" (as I showed in my letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, March 9th, 1922) and the same can be said of "The Mariner." A like thought occurred to Coleridge's editor (and grandson), Ernest Hartley Coleridge, for writing of a poem written "in loving remembrance of the River Otter" he says "Nature takes his pen and writes for him."

> Much is packed in the lines
> A sadder and a wiser man
> He rose the morrow morn.

for they imply that it was not until he awoke in the night (when, as Coleridge well knew, the brain is at its keenest) and had pondered on it until the morning, that the Wedding Guest pierced the trappings of the Mariner's recital and was struck by its profundity. He perceived then that the Mariner told of his voyage only as a way of establishing his doctrine, *viz.* the sanctity of life; he accepted the idea and thereby justified the poet's statement that he was wiser. Coleridge had previously shown a strong attachment to this conviction; I refer to his poem "To a Young Ass," in which occur the lines

> I hail thee brother—spite of the fool's scorn,
> And fain would take thee with me, in the dell
> Of peace and mild equality to dwell.

—on the strength of which, Byron, incautiously, dubbed him "the laureate of the long-eared kind." Thus, in an earlier poem, Coleridge had desired equality with, and even claimed kinship with, a humble fellow-creature, which proves how strongly he felt on the subject, and makes it feasible to suppose that, notwithstanding his avowed intention, he wrote "The Mariner" as nature enforced him.

Therefore, I hold the poet was not concerned with the fate of the Mariner (beyond that it helped him to enforce his moral), but with that of the albatross. The Mariner's

tale is merely his (Coleridge's) inspired way of attracting our attention. It is a parable introduced into a sermon (the poem), as the final gloss says, "to teach by his (the Mariner's) own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth." and if his sermon consists only of parable and its application, well, every preacher is entitled to use his own method of composition. In this case, it is as though Coleridge had planned a surprise attack upon our consciences, and therefore plunged straight into his alluring parable. Moreover, he claims success for his strategy, for his primary "congregation" (the Wedding Guest) became "sadder and wiser."

I would like to stress the perfection of the combination, sadder and wiser, in case it has been objected they are opposing terms; that wisdom should teach us that all is for the best, and should therefore make us happier, even "wise unto salvation." "Sad" has many meanings, and in this instance the poet means "graver," due to thoughtfulness, not grief, and that through being wiser, the light-hearted Wedding Guest (who had "beat his breast" at being kept from "the merry din") became graver.

In the Mariner, Coleridge has painted a superb portrait of a prophet, or founder of a religion, a class, rare in number, whose success depends largely on their fanaticism. When their ideas change, it is from one extreme to the other. Thus, true to type, the Mariner, in one verse and its gloss, rhapsodises over the dead men "so beautiful" and "despiseth the creatures of the calm," but (a few verses on) the latter become *"God's* creatures of the great calm," and the water-snakes things of unutterable beauty. What wrought this change of heart we are not told, probably because, in his wisdom, Coleridge knew no reason was required. Reasoning confines its attention to the head; the heart feels, oftentimes *against* reason.

The result of this "conversion" is that the heedless seaman has now become the prophet, and the cardinal point of his creed is, that the various forms of sentient life are each of equal value in the mind of their creator; that man over-rates himself and claims a superiority, which is non-existent, over the rest of "God's creatures," whether great or small. This, the theme or moral of the poem, has kinship with Hindoo ideas, and one sect in that country, the Jains, hold their highest duty to be a negative one—they must not kill anything. This explains "God save thee, ancient Mariner! From the fiends that plague thee thus!" for a Jain would be similarly overcome by remorse, were it possible to suppose *he* had shot the albatross. It follows that Professor Lowes' dictum (page 300, *The Road to Xanadu*) that "consequence and cause in terms of the world of reality are ridiculously incommensurable" is an over-statement, with reference to the shooting of the albatross and its consequences. Also, as Hindoos in general believe in a great variety of divine beings, and in the poem and its gloss there are demons of earth and of middle air, a troop of angelic spirits, the guardian saint, and the Polar Spirit and his fellow demons, it seems the East should be better aware of the poem's meaning than the West has been. How the West has failed is clear from the writings of two modern professors of literature. Professor Knight wrote recently (and therefore with all the wisdom of earlier critics to draw upon) that "the Wedding Guest is sadder and wiser henceforth and presumably avoids all festive gatherings from now on." This is in error for two reasons. The Wedding Guest could not have been affected by a function he did not attend: the poem inferentially extols the festive gathering the Wedding Guest missed as "sweet," thus, encouraging him not to miss the next one.

Almost from the start of the poem the poet departed from his "romantic" intentions, for in the seventeenth verse, "As if it had been a Christian soul," they hailed the albatross "in God's name," and in the twenty-first verse (which may be considered as the text of the sermon) and throughout the rest of the poem religious

allusions are frequent; the Mariner does "penance" for shooting the albatross; he blesses the water-snakes; he delights to hear the "sweet jargoning" of the little birds, etc., so Professor Lowes', of Harvard (already mentioned), suggestion (page 302, *The Road to Zanadu*) that Lamb's remonstrance to Southey that "A moral should be wrought into the body and soul, the matter and tendency of a poem, not tagged to the end" might be applied to "The Mariner" is untenable for the "tendency" of the poem (or sermon) throughout is strictly towards its sublime peroration:

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

Professor Lowes' regret (page 302, *The Road to Xanadu*) that these two verses form part of the poem is sentiment misplaced, for it is by them that completeness is given to what has gone before; without them the poem would have been, in effect, another of Coleridge's "fragments" and, instead of being wiser, the Wedding Guest (and ourselves) would have been left wondering as to its purport.

"All things both great and small." "He made and loveth all." In the sight of God an albatross is the equal of a man. Thereby Coleridge justifies his description of the retribution exacted for the slaying of the bird. It is a lesson in humility for mankind. God created the Passenger-pigeon, the Great Auk, and other species, and man exterminated them. Byron's "Gentle Coleridge" is declaiming against "blood sports" and thoughtless acts of cruelty, for, no reason being assigned by the Mariner for his act, we are left to suppose he committed it in mere wantonness, and that Carlyle's "good kind soul, full of *religion* and affection" is delivering a poetical sermon on the subject. The moral of that sermon is the spirit of the poem; an undercurrent moving it along as smoothly as "the lonesome spirit from the South Pole" moved the ship—so smoothly that it has hitherto escaped notice.

HOWARD PARSONS.

ANNIVERSARY

O MEMORY, be still! Be quiet to-day!
Nor turn towards the meeting and the leaving
Of pageant and procession of an hour,
And other hours grown old and tired with grieving.

Dust waits for me, yes, dust upon the stairs;
Coals to be fetched, and garments to be mended.
Stir not or breathe upon the dust of ages,
Nor on a fire that never need be tended.

I've lived so long in an unlighted house
I shall not fear another Darkness dawning:
Hearing a requiem sung for those lost years
Come then with me! Dance back towards the morning!

CYNTHIA PALMER.

1940

I KNEW a Woman in the days of peace
whose life was silken-smooth with no
coarse threads
knotting its golden texture.
Moon-cold her heart and as the stars remote
from human ills . . . . .
A Woman like the full-blown moon that glares
upon you from a flat and empty sky—
you glance at it indifferently
finding no beauty in that lidless stare.

Then came the War.
It splintered all the ice about her soul.
The mists of grief flowed over her, and clouds
crept from the far horizon thick with storm.
Now was a gallant spirit born in her.
She made the mists of sorrow luminous,
she edged the clouds with the red light of hope.
With sacrifice her life was beautiful
even as the moon is beautiful
enveiled with mist when all the cradling clouds
are rimmed with glory 'ere they cover her.

SYDNEY SNELL.

NOISE

MY feet made all the noise in Kensington ;
Sunday was fast asleep, the houses lay
Sleepily arm-in-arm and almost snored ;
My feet went thundering on and would not stay.

I drowned my ears in thought to drown the noise
Of feet that rang like tempests in the street ;
My feet made all the noise in Kensington—
I grew afraid because of thundering feet.

But on and on they went, as loud as winds,
As loud as mountains walking side-by-side,
Louder than sudden laughter in a church,
Or silence in a room where someone died.

And so, ashamed, I urged them to the park,
Indolent park on Sunday holiday,
And there my feet went thundering down the walks
With roar that swept all other sound away.

So flaming anger drove me under trees,
Across green lawns I made my loud feet pass ;
Then, God be praised ! their thundering grew still—
But oh ! the shouting of the trampled grass !

MYFANWY HAYCOCK.

SKIES OVER SOMERSBY

Before the war a receptive visitor might gain much pleasure from the flat roads of East Anglia. Driving was easy, for there were no crowds; the connoisseur of scenery requiring vertical grandeur or, at least, undulating variation, went elsewhere, leaving for the less sophisticated a wide unbroken horizon, that gift of a level landscape which is content to act as mere physical support while the glance fleets from its green and gold to the light and colour of the sky. Here the attention is directed and held and the "far-folded mists and gleaming halls" do not fade until they have become merged in the memory.

If, then, this influence is felt by the casual observer, it must have a more intense effect on the apprehensions of a poet, and it is just this influence that permeated the very being of the young Tennyson. In the colour-sense of his poetry we may trace his acquaintance with the intricacies of the Morris tapestries, the imagery of Rossetti, the textures of Burne-Jones, but the skies over Somersby where she was born 134 years ago this August count more than these. Skies of every hour and every season have tinctured his verse as surely as if he had written with crushed opals, and have crystallized into a magic that remains with us long after we have read, and even agreed with, the deprecating criticism that trails after the glory.

The spell is all the more surprising when examination reveals that the actual colour-vocabulary is limited to the primaries, a few secondaries, half-a-dozen jewels and a continual chorus of the shadow-grey, the silver and the gold. Tennyson is alive to all the nuances, but in order to evoke them in other minds he relies chiefly on the context; this so often relates to distance that the "stained glass" charge of one critic is open to dispute. How skilfully, for example, perspective is used to assist one primary:

> The charmed sunset linger'd low down
> In the red West.

and the whole atmosphere of a summer's day is relumed in:

> All in the blue unclouded weather,

while the same poem (Lady of Shalott) brushes in a stretch of yellow not named but suggested by:

> Long fields of barley and of rye

Surely these are the long fields of Lincolnshire! They keep company with:

> All the land in flowery squares,

and, in the same poem (The Gardener's Daughter):

> A length of bright horizon rimm'd the dark.

Not one pansy but a host are ushered into a line:

> Darker than darkest pansies

followed by:

> More black than ashbuds in the front of March.

A similar feeling is disclosed in:

> And saunter'd home beneath a moon, that, just
> In crescent, dimly rain'd about the leaf
> Twilights of airy silver. (Audley Court).

and:

> Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn,
> The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
> And murmuring of innumerable bees. (The Princess).

The colour-words lifted from "The Dying Swan" are a harmony in themselves:

> doleful grey, blue, white, cold-white,
> marish-green, purple, yellow, gold, silvery,

and are an interesting comparison with the

flaxen, rose, blue, violet, silver, crimson

of "Adeline."

The infinite shades of green give him some trouble. In addition to "marish-green" we have "slumbering green" (The Kraken), "live green." "emerald-coloured," "waning lime," and a happy effort :

Flush'd . . with . . gold-green. (Recollections of the Arabian Nights).

The same poem is enhanced with :

The citron-shadows in the blue.

Contrast is another help-mate. In addition to "crimson-threaded" with "silver-treble" (Lilian) there is

Purple blazon'd with armorial gold (Godiva),

and "Oenone" :

I waited underneath the dawning hills,
Aloft the mountain lawn was dewy-dark,
And dewy-dark aloft the mountain pine :
Beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris,
Leading a jet-black goat white-horn'd, white-hooved,
Came up from reedy Simois all alone.

This poem is full of strong contrasts which give appreciable depth of tone with "purple, golden, jet-black, milk-white," and, in one verse alone, "dark pines, blue gorge, snowy peak, snow-white cataract, slips of silver."

The jewel-words yield "amber morn" (Ode to Memory) and the already-mentioned "emerald-colour'd," which are familiar enough, but when, like the pansies, ash-buds, twilights and rivulets, they are multiplied into infinity, they become the ensigns of poetry :

Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth work
Of subtlest jewellery. (Morte d'Arthur).

Even lovelier is a phrase with "subtlest" alliteration :

A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded limes. (Maud IV).

But it is a silk material that becomes etherealised in the famous line, thrice-quoted (for how could the poet himself help being rather taken with it ?) :

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful. (Morte d'Arthur).

How many Lincolnshire winters are woven into those six words !

The experience of many English dawns taught him to capture a foreign one ; the essence of a first morning in Switzerland emanates from :

How faintly flush'd, how phantom fair,
Was Monte Rosa, hanging there,
A thousand shadowy-pencill'd valleys
And snowy dells in a golden air. (The Daisy).

Is it through the skies of Somersby that his vision is strangely raised to prophecy ? In "Locksley Hall" we read :

Pilots of the purple twilight

and

Nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue.

Only the sunset that is a rare experience remains intact in the memory. There was one at the end of the last war, when the clouds were driven into a perspective of golden arches like the nave of some celestial cathedral. People remember that sunset to-day. So with Tennyson, the wonder that once thrilled us has merged like the vanished skies ; but he led us to the golden arches of poetry and has a share in that transient loveliness that becomes the permanent.

BERTHA L. DAGLEY.

NOT AS PALE GHOSTS

WHEN they return
Who have crossed the Viewless Barrier,
They come not as pale ghosts
From far phantasmic coasts,
Or spectral shadows :
No emanations these from funeral urn,
No shivering wraiths who peer
Through misted windows, or austere
Forms from Elysian dream-meadows :
They break upon our unprepared dull senses
Like fountains on the dark aridity
Of desert-sands ; they burn
To ashes our pretences
And false imaginations,
Shatter our frail defences,
Flood us with their intense vibrations,
And sweep us into the circle, wide and free,
Of their miraculous vitality !

For this is Living, this is Life,
And the Joy of Life ! This is Being,
Whose keen sharp ecstasy as a knife
Cuts through our clouded seeing,
Destroys our walls of stupidity,
Storms our vain citadels
Of preconceived supposing,
Wrecks our self-torturing rigidity.
This is Life ringing bells
Whose paeans shake
The curtains of our stagnant air :
Life flinging arrows of light
Across our drugged and dozing
Half-unconscious minds which, losing
All sense of time-and-space dimension, wake
To a new bright experience of Sight.

This is Seeing, this is Feeling,
This is Knowledge, stealing
Like a fresh wind into our ignorance !
Their calm eyes smile upon
Our doubt in gracious benison ;
Their touch like cool spring-water washes
Away sorrow we thought too deep for healing ;
Their kiss is a white fire beyond compare,
Their breath a fragrance inconceivable :
For they live, they are aware,
They come in unbelievable
Colour and radiance,
Not as pale ghosts !
Who lives if these are dead ?
We are the limited,

We, the earth-rooted hosts
Who can but share
Their glory in brief flashes :
We are the deaf, the blind, the oft uncomforted.
Who in these rare
Approaches, this divine unsealing,
Clasp Life as nearly as we dare.
See, hear, receive, and bow the head
At such sublime revealing.

EVA MARTIN.

THE CRIPPLE

HE went laughing, and ruddy of cheek,
Very young and unproven,
Back to his duty. He would speak
Of things as they are, treading only
The shallows. His eyes were in focus
With youth, with a simple perspective :
The design of his leisure shaped for enjoyment.
His vision was careless, objective.

He knew quick pity for things in pain,
For the stricken playmate
And the wounded beast. But he was sane
And vital, and his body was whole ;
His limbs exulted in work or play,
Why should he dwell on imperfection ?
He left us, charged with courage for battle, reckless.
Almost impatient of protection.

He came again to us, safe, unscarred,
But his cheeks were as white
As the breast of a swan. He was new and hard.
"Yes, a good scrap. We sank three of theirs.
No, we only had room to pick up
Our own chaps." Then he frowned and muttered.
"Never saw so much blood." And he stopped and grinned.
Half ashamed of the words he uttered.

We can rejoice. He is whole and sound.
But he must acknowledge
The limping spirit, the secret wound.
His eyes are puzzled, their vision bruised
By blood, and waste, and mutilation ;
He cannot see how to circumvent
His own lame shadow. War teaches youth too suddenly
The bitterness of enlightenment.

JUANITA PEIRSE.

QUESTION

MY faith is gone.
But dare I let it go,
In this bewildering world,
Where certainty,
Of all but death,
Is but a feeble cry
Against the unheeding dark ?
O dare I know
The uncharted wilderness
Where bleak despair
Goes sighing like a phantom on the wind
Alone and desolate ?
Dare I forsake
The tattered creeds,
Frayed shibboleths,
That bind
The lonely little island of my soul
To the vast continent of remembered time,
The tottering framework of belief that spans
The unplumbed abyss,
A fragile bridge between
The undiscovered dawn and the jaded day,
Break clean from all the comfortable lies
That stunt and stultify the budding mind
As barren soil denies the flowers to grow ?
Dare I destroy the old allegiances,
With naught but my own strength to build the new ?
Must I not still seek mercy in truth's twilight,
Being too weak to bear its naked glory ?
Is that the coward's way,
A sordid story
Besmirching life's great book ?
Wisdom or fear
Is it that holds me trembling on the brink
Of swift decision ?
That is my question !
Who dare answer it
With a serene assurance,
Ringing and clear ?

W. R. LATHAM.

REQUIEM

HE that was sweet
As the cherry on the bough,
Lovely and delicate—
Where lies he now ?

Over the round hill,
Sky, field and shadow
He has sown his leaping blood,
And green grows the meadow.

How shall I sing
For sun or for soldier
While the worm is wandering
By his white shoulder ?

Weep, little willow,
Bow down your head.
Break, break, quiet earth,
For my love is dead.

JEAN KENWARD.

PLAINT

THEY sent my lover to the war,
And he who knew supremely how
To love, must love no more.

Sent him to choke
In fire and smoke
With sobbing breath
To hazard death;
A puppet of fate
Goaded to hate;
Sent him to hell:
The sickening smell
Of comrades dead,
Unburied,
Rotting around
The carrion ground.
Who cares for tears,
For throbbing fears?
Who hears his cry
If he should die?
If he should die!

What has he done for this, whose only crime
Has been to love life, and his fellow-men?
Now he dies or serves sentence for all time.
Who will unteach bloodlust to him again?
How shall his memory blot out the hate?
Lashed on his heart forever is a weal
No love can soothe, no peace eradicate.
My love! whose very touch was springing life,
Sweetness of life has fled! What surgeon's knife
Can tear corrosive cancers from your youth?
Ah! rather would I learn your body lies
Mangled and still on some Italian plain,
Than watch the daily horror in your eyes
Seeking oblivion for your mental pain . . .
They sent, they sent my lover to the war.
The unborn children in me cry, "Return!"
But he'll return no more.

HILDA WAREHAM.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

HOW many wives are pacing up and down.
How many sisters sit, and knit and frown,
As engines roar and echo in the blue
In ceaseless regularity. Knit two.
"Our bombers going out."
"How cold it is; but warmer in the sun
No doubt." Was Peter in that one?
They know them all. The woollen ball
Slips from his sister's knee, rolls to the wall.
She stoops—her eyes shut tight, the room goes black.
Dear God, she cries within her,
Bring him back!

WANDA FITZGERALD.

SUMMER, 1943: SUPPLY TRAIN TO THE EAST FRONT

SLEEP is broken.
Loud in the night
Down there on the rails
Engines quarrel, snarl, dispute
The jangling load with temper spurt
Of piston breath : which, caught,
Is snapped, flung clanging, and tossed.

Silence.

And a shout, born to die, fails
In the night and is lost.
Silence
Aquiver with a small high roar
Which grows oncoming, coming on louder :
Twirling clatter of kettledrum sticks
On the hard insistent tympani of low-running bass
Out of the far night oncoming louder
Swells onpouring and fills the night-space
Advancing striding nearer, nearer, nearer,
Ghost-filling with spirits a-roar in chorus.

Are these light ghosts which furiously rage,
That the pines in the flux of clangour upraise
Small, frightened hands to the stars ?

The drums of steel are beating fast
Whirling hammers of the flying spokes
Thudding on the anvils of the rail-gaps,
Hard as surf roaring
With bared teeth onpouring
More and more
Louder :
Till the jaws of it crashing
Meet on the shores
Of sleep.

And the wave is drawn withdrawn back taut :
Instrained a million brittle stones
Of iron, grated in the steely throat,
Devoured a metal feast :
And ebbs, receding
Away, away down, and away
To the bloody deeps of the wastel and East.

And the stars hung high in the din-racked night
Bow their bruised heads to their tree-top hands
Vibrant waiting, patient of doom,
Until they dare breathe again
The cool stillness in.

A pale flute whistle disembodied
Bursts, a thin bell, in the night:
Sound tatters float over, faded,
Become gauze to bind my brow.
My breath is hard, and mind, sleep-fevered,
Searches the darkness for understanding
Pressing the velvet gloom to know.

Peace upwells:
Quiet descends in a sigh undulating:
Wakefulness flowers, unfolds my lips:
Is another now waking?
Do his eyes watch in the shadow?
Listening, does he feel, and murmur?

Ft.-Lieut., R.A.F. (Prisoner of War.) G. Villiers.

RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

WHEN my body, small and empty,
Hears not beauty, neither sees;
House it in no solemn casket
Of dead elm or oak wood, please!
Place it in its mother's keeping,
Underneath her living trees.

Let her cool arms take it to her;
Set no hindrance to her powers;
You shall see its resurrection,
When you feel the summer showers.
She will melt it down and mould it
Into roots and leaves and flowers.

Let the ragged-robin caper
Unreproved upon my mound;
Know that this, my selfish body,
Happy servitude has found;
Giving back the joy of colour,
In the darkness of the ground;

When the gladness which I gathered
From the golden boats of broom,
And the blue veil of myosotis
Stretched upon a chalky loom,
Turns again to form and colour
In my little, silent room.

You shall say that you have seen me,
Risen from my grave again,
When the bright Germander speedwell,
Shaking in the summer rain,
Stands a-tiptoe in the churchyard,
Waving to you in the lane.

Frank Batchelor.

FROM A SONNET SEQUENCE

I

WHERE shall I turn, in this world wide and dark,
If not to you, O my beloved one ?
The wind is rough, the day is naked, stark,
I hate the blind indifference of the sun.
I look in vain for thoughtless joy, for now
The dull world of your absence is aware.
The rich fruit ripens on the swaying bough
Yet to what purpose if you are not there ?
Men offer me escape in easy laughter
The fellowship of jovial talk and wine
Yet when the glass is dry, what follows after ?
My heart needs you, and scorns an anodyne.
I seek not things through which I may forget
A pine for you, to make life deeper yet.

II

I do not think Time panders to the Devil
Yet though he may not envy me my joys
His nature cannot rest till he destroys
And beats them down to his dead ruined level.
Therefore I cry "If I must yield to-morrow
Give me one perfect day without a care,
Free from the shadow of all loss and sorrow."
But his unanswering silence beats the air.
I know he will not pledge one single day
He makes no contract with a needy buyer
Who nothing owns and holds all things on hire.
He cannot make such paltry business pay.
Foreclosing both on sinner and on saint.
He needs no bailiff to enforce distraint.

III

The aircraft roars and zooms across the field
We leap and fall, first harshly, then more soft,
The screaming air slips by, but does not yield,
And falling on it, we are borne aloft.
We make a platform of the rushing wind
And walk firm on it in the sight of God
The law that bound us to the servile sod
Is now undone. Nature is disciplined
Her wildest element is now subdued.
The miracle is done before her eyes
We have inherited the forbidden skies,
Our last great victory in our bitter feud.
Death is unconquered. But we ride the air
Higher and swifter than the eagles dare.

The Consul, Port Said. C. O. Wakefield Harrey.

WAR DAWN

LOVELY it is to remember the valleys
and the steep chalk lanes that fell to the sea,
far from the smoke and the noisome alleys
of towns that have so long imprisoned me.

Lovely to dream of the moonlight seeping
through cottage lattice and elms' straight limbs;
to recapture the note of the nightingale's weeping
and the lark's dawn hymn as it skyward climbs.

And now the black trains in the shunting-yard clanging,
panting and hissing make ready for flight.
They bear me away on the wings of my longing
to memory's country of verdure and light.

JOANNA P. COCHRANE.

TO PRUE ON PARTING

THE leaves, old Nature's sand-glass, fell apace,
For time was passing quicker then we knew;
I felt Love's spirit brushing past my face
That day I walked in Burnham Woods with you.
And there I found what love can sometimes be:
Not just a flush of passion through the frame,
But gentle peace, a sweet tranquillity,
And joy a steady, not a flickering, flame.

Puppets of Fate, we meet awhile and part;
Those beeches we shall never see again,
Nor ever, ever read, O, dearest heart,
The Song of Songs together in the rain.
Forgive me, Prue, that I am now so sad,
Who should be happy, seeing you are glad.

PATRICK HARVARD.

SEARCHLIGHTS

ACROSS the London night
(Beyond eye's reach they gleam)
Now rise, now fall the nimble arms of light,
Tossing from beam to beam
A swooping aeroplane
And catching it again.

And suddenly I see
Light shift on eager hands
Where Nausicaa from the Odyssey
Among her maidens stands,
Whose white arms rise and fall
Throwng the leathern ball.

BRIAN HILL.

THE STRUGGLE

THERE was a stir and tremor in the moon
As that shy silver mirror of the light
Shed furtive loveliness o'er troubled men,
Who cried, unheeding, for the coming fight
Our children will be slain and all
our women widowed into night.

They set them down—an urgent motley throng,
Strong men who take their harvest at the dawn,
Rending amain the veil of trivial things,
For with white heat are stern decisions born :
And when they rose they held as one
their little lives in pawn.

Many came forward seeking what was right,
And soon they met their morrow of desire :
The bugle sounded and the youthful cavalcade
Passed forth in honour and in God's attire—
And gazed upon an anguished world
from out celestial fire.

The maw of Death was held expectant
And his heavy lips were asking "when ?"—
The mellow hours of autumn were too few
To cage the hatred of the sons of men—
The blind unhating hatred taught them
from the cradle of their ken.

Dead winter came and then the hand of spring,
The song of birds, the skipping lambs, the sun ;
High summer blent its radiance with the awe
That fell on many where dark deeds were done
And slaughter filled the echoes of the years
with all its craving run.

When shall we wake, O sleeping Lord, say when ?
And find the haven of the bright new air ?
Lo ! Kindness is off-shouldered in the streets,
And Love led captive through a world's despair :
When shall we lose this dream, and, waking,
mount the golden stair ?

There came a pause and then the thunder rolled ;
A crash, a screaming, and a shout of hate !
Captains and armies toppled into dust,
Mercy was crucified before this spate,
That raised its viperous voice to mould
the angry hand of Fate.

The cry of creedless men had now prevailed,
The blind had led the blinded into sight ;
And now they read the long resentful scroll
That summoned this cloud-pageant of the night,

And fled before the sceptred Lips which called
for mortal light.

But we have won. Yes, Beherroth is dead.
And on our walls hang old lascivious swords;
Schooled are our minds to matters ripe and large,
Stamping soul-mandates on the gaping hordes—
For limitless the acres which this mighty Dawn accords.

What field shall prove the issue of our ken,
Where worlds and wishes meet the melting-pot?
Shall we take swords to slay the slaving men—
We who are victims of an ageless rot?
The next new struggle, the war of things
unborn, say when? Say what?

ARTHUR ROW

EPISTLE TO THE HEATHEN

I PRIME the piece and press the trigger . . .
Not as one of a troop trained so to do,
Nor as one who rejoiceth in the Art
Or loveth Slaughter or hateth the Foe,
Nor yet as one who battleth for Homeland
Or for Freedom or for the Right
Or for any Motto else,
But verily as one who, bearing in his body
The marks of his calling,
Abhorreth Violence
And him who wieldeth it
Whom I would put utterly away . . .
So that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:
That he who taketh up the Sword
Shall perish by the Sword.

Major, R.A. MAURICE BURKE.

SOFTLY the suburban rain
Wept on the window of the train
Misted bleary eye of glass
Watching the shoddy villas pass.
A broken reed
Stands in the mire,
A broken creed
In the church's spire;
Phallic symbols point the way
To an old forgotten day.
Man prefers blind faith to fear,
Observes throughout the Christian year
The pagan festivals he knew
When moral hypocrites were new.

R.N.

Blind, blind,
"God is kind.
God is love";
A dove
Is strutting in the guano patch
Whose dull flat tombstones match
The routine lives which came
To be a date, a name,
A tawdry marble and a plaster cast.
The train death-rattles past.
"God will forgive";
Forget your fears
And dry your tears,
It cannot be a sin to live.

A. RALPH.

DEAD

SHE lies so peacefully upon the bed
That when I entered softly at the door,
And moved on quiet foot across the floor,
I could not yet believe that she was dead.

Will she not turn again her darling head,
And smile upon me gently as before?
Will welcome shine in those dear eyes no more,
Nor word of love by the pale lips be said?

While in that awful calm she sleeps serene
Sounds in her ears the everlasting throb
Of immortality's unbounded tide.

Those eyes, though sealed in death, behold the unseen.
And beyond reach of human tear or sob,
On the ineffable are opened wide.

W. H. SEYMOUR.

CAMELS

WHO shall describe the majesty of a hundred camels,
Moving silently in the still greater silence of the desert.
With long limbs swinging tirelessly, and bodies swaying in gentle rhythm,
Necks curving delicately to pluck the flowerlets from the sparse bushes,
Nostrils ready to close tightly against the sand,
And cushioned feet that move springily upon the stones?

Who shall fathom the mystery of that far-off gaze,
Disdainful and aloof, and full of a sombre pride,
That has witnessed the desert in all its moods,
That has seen the beauty of the dawns and sunsets,
The terror of floods and siroccos;
That seems to have known all things from the beginning of time?

N. HOSALL.

REQUIEM

A FANFARE will not wake you. Nor will my curse
Of vengeance bury you. You wanted no cerements,
No wine nor water with your hearse.
Then will I hire a fiddler for the wake,
Who tore with naked fingers at the stones to make
You a grave. No, you may rot content.
There'll be no psalms for you, no silver spent
On rituals and requiems.
For I am sick, mortally sick of death
Which hangs, sour, like a cloud upon my breath.
Lie quiet then,
And reincarnate in the grace
Of this my cold Amen.

Ex-Irish Guards. PETER RAWLINSON.

SUPER-NATIONALISM

UTOPIAN fields are all they till
Who clamour for a coming day
When one transcendent Western Will
Shall sweep all lesser rule away,
And to the wounded world of Man
Play Caesar turned Samaritan.

As wisely might they scan the skies
In hope to see the ascending sun
To full meridian splendour rise,
When scarce one radiant hour has run.
A noble, needed, office still
The self-ruled Nation must fulfil.

Its measured bounds yield ample scope
For World-Reformers' wakened zeal;
And opening vistas warrant hope
Of such shamed sense of common weal
As may avail to thrust aside
Raptorial greed and racial pride.

THOMAS THORNELY.

ON SACRIFICE

HE'S dead, that boy you used to pass,
Walking, hunched up against the rain;
Or strolling, hatless in the sun;
He's dead: you'll not meet him again.

You feel no grief; why should you when
His death has scarce disturbed your life.
Sufficient if a monument
Commemorates his pointless strife.

Lest we forget: the words mock us
As death rots heroes in the soil,
We have no time, except to seek
Reward won by their bloody toil.

How can there be room for the dead
In plans designed for those that live?
Ghosts have no place in bright new worlds,
For they have nothing more to give.

JOHN W. LEE.

NOVEMBER

STEEL Blue—
And the flame of an orange Eye;
A lonely thrush's sudden Elegy for Spring;
The frozen crust of "Manna" from the sky;
And the dim purple cloak of Winter's harbouring.

Major, D.S.O. W. T. SHORTHOSE.

DYNAMICS OF AMERICAN POETRY: CI

Dr. Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress, Washington, D.C., presents, through the Riverside Press, a volume of essays concerning America, entitled *A Time to Act*. Mr. MacLeish is the author of many volumes of verse and prose and stands high in the literary world of America. Among these essays we find two poems. In "Colloquy for the States" Mr. MacLeish gives us a witty estimate of the many differences in the States. We give a few lines :

Can't make out : too far east says Michigan
East of the roosters says Indiana.
East of the morning crows says Ohio,
East says New York.
East still says Connecticut : on east.
It's down east from here says Massachusetts.

The other poem, "The Western Sky," is a stirring challenge to America :

Be proud America to bear
The endless labour of the free—
To strike for freedom everywhere
And everywhere bear liberty.

Lift up O land O land lift clear
The lovely signal of your skies.
If freedom darkens eastward, here
Here on the west let freedom rise.

On receiving *Poems in a Book,* by Malcolm Kevin Burke (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York), we wrote to the author only to learn that he is overseas and has left to us, his reading public, his first collected poems, which deals with the worth of love of sacrifice and of enduring faith. We cannot help hoping wherever this poet is stationed that all is well with him so far as maybe in war. We quote from his own statement of how he finds poetry : "It is vital and impels with a fleeting dynamism the poet through whom it is sounded . . . There is no 'how' or 'why' to these poems : they just are." One of these, "Immortality—A Preface," strikes a fine note :

A song each day :
It's not a high endeavour
But serves to keep something brilliantly awake,
So, singing on of living things without a break,
I wonder if I might go on this way
For ever.

Many of us who love poetry have the conviction that love is best related in poetry. Let us read Mr. Burke's "Love Song" :

Time is a lonely path over the fields
Bending to sunset. Shadows of deep clouds
Scatter at intervals. On the waste, sombre
Reflections of what was mar what will be.

Time is a lonely path, passing the hours
Equidistant through empty acres, gone
By countless times and never passed. Void peace,
Like mist, thickening in the west, blots out
Motion. Time is a lonely path. All wanderers
Go singly, silent, imperceptibly.
They stand for nothing : out of nothing ; bound
For nothing. There is just the path to follow.
Now and then, two jostle . . . and pause a moment,
Despising fate, to flake the path in gold.

It would seem that Norman Rosten has had a charmed life. Still in his early twenties, he has been notably successful. From the University of Michigan he

received both in poetry and drama the Avery Hopwood Award. His first book *Return Again, Traveller,* published by Yale University Press, is in itself, a distinction, now followed by *The Fourth Decade* (Farrah and Rinehart, Inc., New York).

It appears that Mr. Rosten's goal in poetry is not the obscure, but the simple direct language that all may understand. We quote :

> "What I am concerned with most in my poetry is the external world and its action, for the beliefs and heroisms of that world are, finally, the sources of poetry. I do not belong to that school which holds to the curious belief that poetry is written for poets, and should be as difficult and obscure as possible. Poetry is not an intellectual puzzle, nor a bout with language. It should neither exhaust not confuse, but invigorate and clarify."

From his poem concerning the League of Nations we give the following :

> Children sailing their leaves upon the lake
> reassured us of peace, but we did not smile.
> For somewhere, actual as ourselves,
> boys remember their first touch of love
> and the moon advances beyond the hill ;
> and in the dawn that never fails to come,
> above the trees tall military calm,
> distant rifles click, are brought to the eye,
> and somewhere our own heart is sighted.

Afternoon of a Pawnbroker, by Kenneth Fearing (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York) reminds us that Mr. Fearing holds a unique position in the poetry world. In place of writing about moonstruck roadways, he chooses the subway as his *mise en scene.* These are likeable and talented tales about the everyday. He writes with a continuity—one poem runs into the other all through the pages. Let us read "Finale" :

> How cold, how very cold is the wind that blows out of nowhere
> into nowhere,
> Winding across space and uncalendar's time.
>
> Filled with the sound of living voices, as it winds through the ears that
> once were Stephen's ears,
> Charged with the scent of fields and forests, as it blows through the
> nostrils that once were Jane's.
>
> Winding through the sockets that once were David's eyes,
> Weaving again, as she used to do, the soft brown hair that once was
> Mary's hair,
> Bringing again the words that once were Stephen's and David's and
> Mary's words into and out of their deaf ears,
> Scattering the worlds that once were theirs, and yours, and mine,
> Bearing away to nowhere and to no place the very especial sins and
> virtues that once were ours,
>
> How cold, how extremely cold is this wind.

Belonging to the distinguished family of Flexners, it surprises no one to find Hortense Flexner has written *North Window* (Coward-McCann, Inc., New York), a book of poems—which are highly recommended. They claim that *North Window* has the rarest of all qualities in poetry—the quality of interesting the reader as a

story interests one. By this author are "Clouds and Cobblestones," "This Stubborn Root" and "The Wishing Window." Let us lose no time in reading "The Measure" :

Now frail the flower and strong the weed,
The shaggy vine sprawls on the ledge,
The spider's rope, the bearded seed
Float on still air to strike the hedge.

In space, magnetic pull and ray
Have made earth stagger and turn back ;
But here the blue grape points the way
A planet keeps its curving track.

Not as we bind the stalk and sheaf
The abstract tasks of sky are done,
Yet at my door the shrivelled leaf
Measures the long step of the sun.

and also "Belief" :

In six gold weeks of summer
The striped bee,
Still eager for more roses,
And sunny paths of clover sweetness,
Dies,
Believing that flowers are eternal.

There comes to-day from Alfred A. Knopf, publishers, a handsome pocket volume to be carried in any man's pocket, *The Stag's Hornbook*, edited by John McClure and William Rose Benet. The poems herein have been gleaned from the years by John McClure and William Rose Benet. We find five hundred verses to meet many moods, in fact, any moods is the claim of the editors. We happened to open the page to a short verse by Oliver Herford :

God made man
Frail as a bubble
God made Love,
Love made trouble.

God made the Vine
Was it any sin
That man made wine
To drown trouble in ?

and in merry mood, among we read a verse of James Russell Lowell :

Then fill the cup, fill high ! Fill high !
Let joy our goblets crown,
We'll bung Misfortune's scowling eye,
And knock Foreboding down.

Joseph Auslander is to me one of the most fascinating figures in poetry. His graduation from Harvard, which led him into the circle of Miss Lowell of Brookline and brought about his writing of the book *His Letters to Women* is an outstanding episode. Young and ardent he wrote with charm and a perfect understanding of the rhythmic necessity of poetry. For some years he taught poetry at Columbia and then graduated to the Poetry Chair of Congress, especially instituted for him. He is successful in purchasing rare original manuscripts to add to the Library.

Now we find him in a new field. He has tackled the war in this last book, *The Unconquerables* (Simon and Schuster). Mr. Auslander makes this statement : "I wrote these letters to the Unconquerables because I had to ; because the plight of the peoples worked in me like a fever ; because their agony and their courage had aroused my anger and my admiration to a point where I could not do otherwise than endure it."

In turning the pages we find his striking "Dunkerque Anniversary" :

When the beast from the dark primordial slime
Bellowed his hunger for blood and bone,
When the Czech stood stalwart and sublime
Against the tusks of the mastodon,
When the Pole was gored for the hundredth time,
When the Fleming's furious fate was known,
When the Dutch and the French blazed blood and grime—
England elected to fight alone.

For nine incredible nights and days,
Beneath the pounding of bomb and gun,
Beneath the infernal heat and haze,
Beneath the pitiless blood-drenched sun,
On the Norman beach's glare and glaze
The weaponless Tommy faced the Hun,
And while we could only gasp and gaze
England elected to fight alone.

When the Stukas droned their savagery,
And it seemed no strength could stop that drone,
A small and gallant company,
Hurled that hellant company,
Wrought an eagle-defended Thermopylae,
Laughing at death from a treacherous throne :
Pillared in flame between sky and sea,
England elected to fight alone.

From Beowulf, Alfred and Harold on,
From Arthur and Armstrong and Robin Hood.
This is the breed of Bellerophon,
This is the Lion's fearless brood,
This is the Balaclava blood,
This is the creed of the Camperdown :
When all but the soul is quite subdued,
England elects to fight alone.

Now that face the foe as one,
The foul implacable fiend, none other,
Eternally cunning, the ruthless Hun,
Now that we stand as brother with brother,
Now that the enemy is known,
Now that we rally round our Mother,
Until the beast in his own blood smother,
England no longer fights alone.

In *In Time of War*, a first book by Cecil B. Williams (The Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa), we find a teacher of poetry turned poet. With many serious textbooks to his credit, it was the burning spirit of the war that carried his pen to poetry. Born in Oklahoma, and a graduate of Oklahoma A. and M. College, he won, when at Chicago University, the Ph.D. degree in English and American Literature. The sonnet form holds this poet spellbound, and he says of himself that his writing is the

honest expression of his reactions to the events of the war. A man in middle life, he speaks with assurance and maturity and has dealt more successfully with the horrors of this war than many of the other poets. A fine example of Dr. Williams' talent is found in "Realms of Gold" :

Fain would I travel in the realms of gold
Where Keats heaped up the gleanings of his brain.
There would I find Ben Jonson rare and bold
And all his sons, likewise the golden chain
That Avon's bard wrought out. Mad Shelley's voice
Would speak sweet tones, and Chaucer pilgrim tale
Renew, grave Milton make L'Allegro's choice,
And Shalott's Lady show her features pale.

But fireside bliss is not for me. From seas
And land and air come crashing sounds, and grief
Spreads wide. Forgotten are Hesperides
And blissful peace ; the world is withering leaf.
A dreamer may not dream in time of war ;
He fights to save what he but loved before.

Rockland, Maine, has the honour of being the birthplace of one of America's outstanding poets, Edna St. Vincent Millay, on February 22nd, 1892. Graduating from Vassar College in 1917 she carried away with her honours, as well as the distinguished diploma of Vassar and other colleges. Her writing life seems to have been one charmed by the gods, her own gifts meriting many distinctions. Not a poet in the writing world but casts an admiring, if not envious, glance at the happy way she has travelled in poetry. She has elected in this last volume, *Collected Lyrics* (Harper and Brothers), to place together her choice culled from her years of writing. We find here her poems from the *Renascence* to *Huntsman, What Quarry?* arranged chronologically. Miss Millay has recently lost a younger sister—gifted likewise with the genius of song. All readers of poetry have a favourite poem of Miss Millay. This reviewer finds too many thronging in her mind to make a choice.

ALICE HUNT BARTLETT.

THE INLAND GULL

(for R.H.)

HE flung up the sky
from the frozen waves of earth
in sudden scare,
sailing in a silver curve of
sweeping sickle wings
over the crumbled crests of ragged clouds,
grey-dark and big with rain,
on the pale wastes of the wind.

And only
the sea-bird's trailing cry
comes lonely
down the sullen sky,
forlornly as the frightened scream
of a child in a haunted dream . . .

W. S. ELDRIDGE.

POETS AND PRETENDERS

WE open our general survey of the publications of poetry and verse which have appeared since our last issue with *Sky Saga,* by Thomas (Group Captain) White, D.F.C. (Hutchinson, 5s.). This is definitely a book of verse, but as the dust cover has it, lively verse; we would add the adjectives graphic, unpretentious, sincere and eminently readable. The verse forms and rhyme schemes used are competently varied to avoid monotony and for necessary emphasis, and the volume should be welcome to a public always interested in our young flying men. The author has felt his theme deeply and is content to recount his Saga with fortunately less reticence but with all the unassuming modesty which we have learned to associate with men who take their lives in their hands as a matter of daily routine. The book is a citation for valour of the virile spirit which animates the whole Service of which the author is so justly proud to be a member.

The next volume, *The Second Flight,* by G. J. Shervill (Duckworth), deals not as we supposed, fresh from the preceeding volume, with physical flight, but with excursions on even less substantial wings into the realms of fancy. Yet there are some war poems, but where can they be identified all of them are of the last war, which we once called "the Great," in the belief that it achieved finality in disaster. Mr. Shervill's poems are in the classical form, rhymed and rhythmed with a simple and effortless grace which makes them very acceptable to-day. Reading them we perceived the flowering of that love and skill with words which makes them the fine raiment of thought and provides that simple adornment for sense which is, in itself, the larger half of the amalgam of truth and beauty which is poetry. Here is no great profundity, but a reverence for the medium of communication, which is as admirable as it is rare in an iconoclastic age, which sees in words no potentiality of beauty, but only their utilitarian quality.

The line "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" seems to point with sufficient clarity to both the goal and the limitations of the poet. Originality of thought is an impossibility and we may accept Pope's dictum on this, but there are no limits to the grace with which words may be used, nor to the "brevity which is the soul of wit" with which sense can be beautifully condensed. Why then, it may be asked, do poets seek for originality in expression. Is it because they are denied originality of thought or emotion and desiring to be original at all costs and in some direction, they seek it at the extremest limits of coherency, amid rhythms as disordered as their own vain ambitions ? Or may it be that egotism forbids their treading in the footsteps of the great, content to be overshadowed, but striving none the less for that "well expressed" grace, which contains its own reward and its own justification in the added significance with which it can clothe the most commonplace truths, and thereby invest them once again with that living reality which familiarity had dimmed.

These reflections, however inappropriate, must serve to introduce *The Aspirin Eaters,* by Alec Craig (Fortune Press, 4s. 6d.), since chance brought it next to hand. But in it we go from the sublime to the ridiculous, or *vice versa,* according to the point of view, for the author, in a preface, hails Eliot and Pound as the fathers of modern English poetry, with Auden as its leader, and proceeds by way of a parody or two and a bit of homage to Ezra Pound, which we forbear to quote for fear of being misunderstood, to proclaim the strength of his allegiance.

The fame of the gentlemen mentioned above will not, of course, be affected one way or another by this tribute, but if the verses provided in this volume are worthy examples of this school of modern English poetry, which they founded, then we are made brusquely aware that the term "Modern" is a misnomer in that it continues and develops no older tradition, but turns its back resolutely upon all that the standards of the present and the canons of the past require of poetry. Why call this insurgent,

shadowy stuff poetry at all? So far as it has any meaning it is negligible and in intention it aims by incoherency to be a "communication . . . raised to an extreme intensity of meaning" (*vide* Preface). Let us quote from "Mr. Eliot's Saturday Morning in a Government Office:

Extra muralodytical
Delvers after salient fact,
Consult their watches. Pipit smiles
In the beginning was the act,

In eighteen sixty-six the act
Proceeded from the grand Old Man
When "Pensions (Princess Volupine)"
Shook the first economy fan.

This "modern" poem (inspired, we dare say, by "Sweeney among the Nightingales") proceeds, dimly comprehensibly, through five more verses to its conclusion, thus:

And those who go to lunch too soon
Or impatiently create a fuss
Will never keep an attendance book
Or join my hippopotamus.

"Or, like the author, miss the bus," would possibly convey a clearer meaning. There is no poetry in this stuff or anywhere else in the book, so far as we could discover. Rather it is stark rebellion against poetry, lit at times by an unbalanced indignation against life as we (don't) know it;

I have seen the harlot's bleeding knees
dragged along the curbstone
by our Magnificent Police Force
the little man bashed
in the public school spirit.

Nobody will wish to deny to this sort of thing a kind of misguided vigour, but it is not likely, in our view, to appeal either to posterity or to any moderately mature person alive to-day. It has no observable signs of sustained effort or of inspiration and certainly does not seek to combine sense with beauty in the immemorial manner of the poet.

One gets atrabilious after a conscientious perusal of "modern" poetry, even if one's vocabulary gets a boost, so it was a relief to find that communications were still being made upon an older level than that "extreme intensity of meaning" with which we had just contended. No little men were being bashed in the public school spirit in the interest of intense meaning, in *The Land of Prester John*, by Peter Baker (Resurgam 2s.). The author's imagination was at work on a better theme and the fact that the result is not of great importance is less matter than the sincerity of the effort and the conscious, and at times realised, desire to clothe thought with beauty. Mr. Baker uses the legend of Prester John, rather vaguely, to illustrate the journeyings of mankind to a promised land in a sequence of poems which ends on a prophetically triumphant note of success.

Systems where banker, priest and king
Shall rule Man's destiny
Must vanish all from off the wall
Of human history.

The "wall of human history" rather intrigued us, since, although an end-word, there was no rhyme compulsion to dictate its choice, but this is a small matter since the

meaning is still clear. The author's great theme is, however, too slightly treated. This superficiality is well exemplified by our quotation, but nevertheless there are passages in the book where an excitement of genuine inspiration seized upon him with the inevitable effect that we felt a sudden ease and surety of conviction which owed its power to the lyrical beauty of the rhythm and phrasing whereby we knew, unconsciously, that nothing false could be lovely and, *per contra,* that beauty is truth.

This is, of course, the only justification for versified communication, that it should bring conviction by inspiration born in and by beauty. The "modern" school, which seeks to rub our noses in our indiscretions, with deliberate disharmonies of utterance, conveys nothing to us but a sense of bored affront. This school does not teach its adherents that the acceptability of truth is directly affected by the manner of its presentation—even politicians appreciate the superior credibility of eloquence.

From these last two vastly differing contributions to the ever-swelling ocean of literary effort we reached a little volume of *Love Lyrics,* by Godfrey Locker Lampson (Muller, 5s.). This was something in the Tennysonian tradition, full of music and that deftness with phrase which denotes not only the poet's reverence for words, but his faithful apprenticeship to their service. The lesson that intensity of meaning is a matter of emotion and not of incoherent stridency presented no difficulty to the author, indeed, we doubt whether he ever had to learn it. The serene sureness of his touch is untroubled by doubt as he plucks his lyrical strings. He knows that by his music he will reach our hearts and so contrives that, in his maturity, his songs are as fresh and gay as youth itself. Take this delightful sonnet in the Shakespearean manner :

As when a forest fire devours the grass
Leaving the oak boles blackened in its wake,
And seeks whole parishes to overpass,
Though feebly started in a single brake—
Thus, as we trifled, did I little guess
How soon a tiny spark could leap and grow,
Fanning it idly in my heedlessness,
Till every thought of you began to glow.
Now it's too late, the circle is complete,
Too late to fly the peril or aspire,
Now that the flood is swirling at my feet,
To quell the flames, for like a sea of fire
Your beauty burns me and at last I know
What pain it is to love, in loving so.

Here is no immortal note perhaps, but still something which the world needs, containing as it does in good measure that emotional refreshment and that power of transporting us for a little space into a sweeter atmosphere, which is one of the few civilising influences left to us in a gadget-dazed world.

There was no abrupt transition, no brusque bouleversement of mood in adjusting our own to those of Arthur Ball, whose volume *Moods* (Peter Reed) was next for consideration. The title is apt for a collection of rather slight impressions which seem to have been penned without afterthought for the author's own satisfaction. Their simplicity has the attraction always inherent in this quality, so rarely encountered and so restful when it is. But Mr. Ball's is not the simplicity of artlessness, but that of an observer, whose delight in nature is uncomplicated and moves him to an equally uncomplicated musical response. He is sensitive to almost every aspect of life and he gives us plenty of variety. We take two stanzas from a short poem called "Streets of Morning," a little impression of an urban dawn :

Streets wait quiet, Must open, yet does not ;
Straight, in stiff rows, What blossoms can these
As though for unfolding Bare walls, arid street-lengths,
Of something one knows Ever release ?

Anyone who has watched the light strengthen over a sleeping town will find an echo of his memory in these lines.

Perhaps it was by the operation of one of those freaks of chance called coincidence that we should open next *The Corridor of Dawn,* by Elizabeth White (Hutchinson, 3s. 6d.). We did so with apprehension, for not only was it adorned with a frontispiece of the authoress by Augustus John, but was introduced by Lord Dunsany in what seemed to us somewhat non-committal terms. It has been our unfortunate experience that portraits of authors usually presage a disappointment, but in this case we found the exception and we are prepared to acknowledge the fact in terms of wider appreciation than Lord Dunsany's recognition of the authoress's sincerity. Still, what is this "sincerity" which is now so much a jargon-word of the poetic art ? The answer really covers a great deal of ground, for it means, in essence, that its possessor has written, subjectively, in a heat of emotion, where thought is the handmaid of feeling and merely the means whereby the deeply-felt convictions and emotions are made vocal and intelligible to the reader. Lord Dunsany hints that "faults of the age" have found a place in this book. It is true that there are rough places here and there, but they are not common and for all our traditionalism we have just no criticism to offer for such things as :

Let me lie
In the long shadows of the hills
Until I die . . .
Until the
Gulls are silent in the sad surf
And the green sea
Is still.

One fault of the age anyhow has passed the authoress by. She is never incoherent, nor obscure, nor addicted to esoteric mystifications. She is moved by many things, but never by delusion. That she is not always perfectly rhythmical in utterance and is not, apparently, concerned over much with lyricism, preferring a less harmonious impact upon the ear, is a pity, for the capacity is there and music is at her service. She seems to use modern forms at times in a spirit of experimentation, losing, we think, much of the memorability which is the reward of a clearly-marked rhythm and the oral appeal of rhyme. These embellishments are not at all beyond her and would never subdue her ardent spirit to a lullaby monotony ; in our view her gift of imagery would flower more freely in a tenderer atmosphere where her words were set to a more truly Parnassian measure.

And so to *The Cruel Solstice,* by Sidney Keyes (Routledge, 5s.), an intriguing title, whose application to the matter in hand was beyond our discovery. We are told on the dust cover that with this volume Sidney Keyes reaches full maturity as a poet, which is very naturally a red rag to a critic, upon whose infallibility (?) alone should such a claim be based. But a case pre-judged is not necessarily mis-judged and we were very quickly impressed by a degree of virtuosity with words and an intellectual capacity which are certainly not common to the majority of to-day's versifiers. Where we gently quarrel with the dust cover is over the word "Poet," but before the argument can be pursued it might be pertinent to define that much misused word. Surely a poet is one who combines sense with beauty in rhythms and

cadences which, in some mysterious manner, harmonise with the subject, so that the reader finds delight in receiving something so in accord with his own vibrations that he is carried away on a wave of delicious conviction. Let us apply this test to Sidney Keyes :

> Truth is not found in book or litten glass
> At midnight. Ghosts are liars. None may turn
> Winter's hard sentence but the silly man,
> The workless plowman or the unhoused poet
> In tall clouds mounting the unbroken wind,
> In dry leaves beating at the heaven's face.

This is a fair example of both his work and style and in the last two lines reaches a high poetic level, but it is not often that he has achieved so much. Many of his pieces are purely intellectual, an indulgence of a prolific fancy, wherein is to be observed little of the author, but a lively and fertile mind. We read such pieces with interest, but not with emotional pleasure and herein lies the distinction between verse and poetry. The two things are on different planes although using the same language ; and Mr. Keyes is able to write too much that is uninspired for any claim of the sort which has been made for him to be sustained. There is, however, abundant evidence of an exceptional talent and we must conjecture to what heights this would have led him had the war not claimed him as an untimely and unnecessary victim.

From the same publisher and in the same neat dress comes *Beauty and the Beast,* by John Heath-Stubbs (Routledge, 5s.). The author is said to be a traditionalist, which is possibly another word that lacks an agreed definition. Would anyone regard the following as deserving such a description :

> It is very quiet in the graveyard—a strange place to be waiting for him ;
> The moonlight hints queer perjuries—for all the Dead
> Are tucked up snug in mud ; we have heaped vast lumps of masonry
> Over their head and their feet, fenced them round with crosses
> And stones scrawled over with white lies ; we have given them flowers
> Against the stench, and stopped their nostrils with mud.

We have no wish to carp, but this sort of thing is not, to our mind, even poetry and we must marvel at the complexity of the intelligence which, having written such a passage, could wish to provide it with as much permanence as print and a good publisher can ensure.

Mr. Heath-Stubbs has not yet found himself entirely. To call him a traditionalist, whose influences have been thoroughly assimilated, is to tell us nothing that explains this indulgence in a free verse of the most modern type, lit and enriched in places, but for the most part prose, which has singularly little of that beckoning quality which tempts the reader deeper and deeper into the writer's mind. When he begins to sing to himself and to us, in answer to some melody of his own soul, in the long poem which completes the book—"The Heart's Forest" (from Plutarch)—then we can take courage to think that he *will* find himself, indeed, that he has gone far to do so.

> The heart pauses and stands at gaze
> As you come through the forest of my soul,
> Seeking only your image in the pool
> Of laughter, and the wild rose ;

is a stanza that is worthy of quotation among many others in this poem which, however, war-time space, or lack of it, must deny.

And third from the same press, *The Second Man* (Routledge, 5s.), but how different a vintage, sparkling, but teetotal, invigorating, yet flat. Mr. Julian Symons,

the author, is described as one of the least obscure of modern poets. After reading his book we wondered how he managed to be so bright, so penetrating, and to have so much that was interesting to say and yet so seldom touch the fringe of poetry. There is a brisk life, wit, observation, and intellectual subtlety in plenty but, with it all, Mr. Symons woos no muse, as though he had been taught some where that grown men should not forget their manhood in such dalliance. Even Spring fails to soften this ascetic mind. Thus, the author, in "Spring Poem" :

> The muscles flex, contract,
> Over the sprouting garden,
> The blood moves to shade from
> Faces this burning sun,
> Running and roaring spring
> Permits me to say thanks
> Now the bent arm includes
> You with the cooing pigeons.

No daffodils, no lambs, no bluebells, nothing! not even quite free from obscurity either, in spite of the dust cover's assertions. The last stanza of the last poem in the book reveals better than I can Mr. Symons's faith. Here is a man that knows his own mind, although we do not believe he knows his own potentialities. If only he could be serenaded sometime we are sure he would discover an ear for music and would hasten to recant the stanza in question :

> I offer no apologies
> For these words set down
> In extenuation
> Of the human situation,
> Or for being in my time
> A "difficult" bourgeois poet.
> The flying hours will take us
> And use us as they find us
> Who do not live as we wish
> But write as we can,
> And without knowledge of an end
> Search for it as
> For a personal style.

Somebody's comment on the Charge of the Light Brigade occurs to me, *"C'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas la guerre."*

The way of the critic is hard and gets no easier in times of conflict and stress, when men's minds seem to have been wrenched from the ruts of peace-time plodding to seek flight in all directions. The next volume—*The Summing Up,* by C. A. Hinks (Williams and Norgate, 2s. 6d.)—to invite our summing up was something so new and virile and yet so securely poised between prose and poetry that we have not yet been able to make up our minds which it is, and fear to be driven to the mean compromise of the description, prose-poetry. The book, briefly, is an account of an imaginary trial, before the court of law, of Everyman, for the social crimes of the last twenty years, the sabotaging of international solidarity by his short-sighted neglect of the League of Nations, the introduction of Empire preference at the Ottawa Conference in the interest of a narrow economic advantage and finally his failure to safeguard his wealth with adequate armaments, rendered more than ever necessary by those other sins. The subject may seem, so baldly stated, both a difficult and an unattractive one, but Mr. Hinks has handled it with an ability, an eloquence and a brilliant missionary fire, which holds the attention from the outset and captures both the imagination and the allegiance of the reader.

The book gives no more of the trial than the Judge's charge to the Jury before their retirement, which, involves, of course, a sufficiently complete resumé of the evidence and of counsels' speeches, both for the prosecution and the defence, the whole lit by the Judge's observations and reflections upon them. The author has

seized upon and made the most of his opportunity in a particularly fluent free verse, which he invests with all the pertinence and exact diction of a typical speech from the Bench which, even when it indulges in images and epithets (and it does so very often), still appears convincing, as though this Judge were one with an unusually fine mind. The deft combination of the legal and the poetical is well shown by this judicial remark, taken at random from among many :

> Man's place in such a wealthy-wise society
> was fixed by, changed with his apparent fortune
> and his purported income threw about him
> important purple robes of deference.

We are not told what verdict is reached, indeed, such an anti-climax would have ruined what is no more nor less than a magnificently formed and sustained argument, objectively and impartially stated, for a less materialistic motivation of human life, for less regard to be paid to :

> the wretched heaps of dust for which men strive
> the scraps of paper and the banker's entries
> and all the strange accoutrements of power.

Away with compromise. This is a poem and a fine one, and we wish it far more success that it is likely to get in an age too deeply committed to the false gods of private acquisition to give it a fair hearing. As an example of left wing thinking, forged into poetic utterance, we commend it to all our readers and not less to those whose discontent with social conditions causes them to become vocal on the subject of harlot's knees and the public school spirit.

By one of those swift transitions inherent in our job we plunged straight from the high clarity of a mental heaven into a dim world of cerebration called *The Inward Animal,* by Terence Tiller (Hogarth Press, 3s. 6d.). Professedly introspective it would appear to reveal, where revelation is achieved, which is not always, an unusually restless spirit and one whose taste is in some rebellion against the normal conception and standard of beauty ; while not entirely refraining from their service.

Strong stuff most of these poems, too strong, and given to an over-emphatic diction which never seems to achieve a like significant weight of utterance. From "Elegy—Cairo, 1941," we take the first eight lines :

> Here in the slouching gloom, dusky with nooses,
> horror the rat-catcher parades
> this mockery of fecund glades,
> threading the whistling laugh and flagrant kisses,
> the awkward night-life of the running company :
> the miserable rat-catcher, the ghost
> of what is given or lost ;
> the stalking menace of the castaway.

Here is a kind of vigorous obscurity which leaves quite literally a feeble impression or none at all. In our view such writing is bad, since it fails of its first duty, that of intelligible communication. We are not interested in words, *per se*, but only in their nice arrangement as a vehicle for thought. But we would not give the impression that all Mr. Tiller's work is of this order (or disorder). There are many less obscurely constructed pieces, but none have enough simplicity for us. The author's mind may go very deep, his thoughts may be both profound and beautiful, but he has yet to interpret and edit them properly for us. At present he has the air either of not caring much whether we understand or not, or of trying to dazzle us with an undoubted literary talent. We are quite sure that for him words have some reality, some

existence and value of their own, and are not just merely sounds for the satisfaction of an inner desire for communication. Taking them at the latter level one can never be obscure, nor even difficult and the beauty of the inner conception will quite naturally and in direct ratio to that beauty, choose words and phrases as beautiful for its dress. For the rest, these poems show some preoccupation with sex, which is a little trying to one's sophistication. Certain reticences are generally observed, not as is supposed as the result of a repressive ethical teaching, but because, when the inevitable curiosities of adolescence are assuaged such things become a mere part of the utilitarian apparatus of life.

An anonymous long, but decidedly untedious poem, *To Italy*, reaches us with a note informing us that the proceeds from its sale are to be given to a special fund for Italian children. We are glad to notice this poem for its own sake, without regard to its charitable appeal, for it is a distinguished piece of work, lyrical and mournful by turns, drawing timely attention to the unrivalled glories of Italy's past and to the unsurpassed services of this people to humanity. The richness of the material has given the author's sincerity wings. He is in love with his subject and knows it as only a lover can. ("Open my heart and you will see graven inside of it Italy.") His faith, sorely tried, is however undefeated, and the beauty of his poem carries us willingly enough into the same warm atmosphere of hope for future greatness, which is implicit in his every line and stanza.

The history of man is a record of triumph and failure, of progress and retrogression. Italy no more than epitomises the common fate. If her failures have been abject her triumphs have been unequalled and mankind still must acknowledge a debt to the race which gave us Dante, Galileo, Botticelli, Raphael, Angelo. If there was a recession, if

> Thy glory died in honour's dearth,
> Thy trumpets drowned in mandolins ;

we should still do well to remember the "Mother of their glorious ghosts." The poem (price sixpence) may be purchased at Bumpus's in Oxford Street, or Lamley and Co., 5 Exhibition Road, S.W.7.

We are indebted to Columbia University for many pregnant cultural studies, the lastest being an examination of *The American Way of Poetry*, by Henry W. Wells, who deploys the diversity and vigor of the American poetic genius, which has excelled in exploration and pioneering and has gone with rough directness to life itself, exemplified in these detached but co-related chapters on Whitman, "the foremost spokesman of our national soul," Whittier, a product of New England folk culture, biblical and social, the fastidious Edward Arlington Robinson, "the poet of the soul," in the charge of the New England conscience, the provincial-cosmopolitan Robert Frost, bound to the New England earth, the dynamic Carl Sandburg, singer of smoke and steel, of the transient factory and the eternal prairie, the dominating, naturalistic Robinson Jeffers, of the South-West, and some later and lesser-known exponent of the American way of poetry, pioneers of thought, vision, revelation and definition, and at their best more stimulating, vital and distinct than their British contemporaies.

The first number of *Poetry Scotland* (Maclellan, Glasgow, 64 pp., 4s. 6d.) is disappointing. Title and content are too closely allied to a London contemporary ; *PS* may be regarded as a Scots supplement and partly a replica of *PL*. Capt. Maurice Lindsay and his enterprising publisher might have shown more Scottish independence and originality. Scotland is represented by a familiar group in poetry : Hugh

MacDiarmid, J. F. Hendry, Ruthven Todd, William Jeffrey, Edwin Muir, R. Crombie Sanders, Alexander Galloway, G. S. Fraser, George Bruce, W. S. Graham, Francis Scarfe (by virtue of having been French Lecturer in Glasgow University, or Army education officer in the Faroes) and, of course, William Soutar. There is no discovery. The poems are almost entirely definitely English : a few have a Scottish idiom, and in one piece Douglas Young is more Scottish than Burns. A prose article by the redoubtable Hugh MacDiarmid and a Laodicean introduction by Compton Mackenzie give hope of a more definite policy, and an insurgent individualism. The Scottish group is supported not by native newcomers, who must be clamouring for admission to *Poetry Scotland's* close preserves, but by Welsh (Henry Treece, Robert Herring, Kiedrych Rhyes), English (Nicholas Moore, Emanuel Litvinoff, Alex Comfort, John Singer), and Irish (John Hewitt, Donagh Macdonagh, Maurice Craig) contributors, with not a feminine writer, not even Anne Ridler, among them.

Outposts follows in the wake of the foregoing. It "has been established to provide a convenient platform for the younger writers" and is "concerned not only with the publication of outstanding poetry at a reasonable price, but also in assembling those poets recognised and unrecognised who, by reason of the particular outposts they occupy, are able to visualise the dangers which confront the individual and the whole humanity now and after the war." The first result is the assembly of nine poems in a crown 8vo pamphlet of eight pages, two of which have apparently already appeared elsewhere. Among the holders of these individual outposts are the ubiquitous Nicholas Moore, Maurice Lindsay, Robert Greacen and Henry Treece, who have put a call through in THE POETRY REVIEW. Perhaps the editor, Howard Sergeant, makes the most positive claim :

> We are the malcontents
> Nutured in heresy, who mined the harsh veneer
> Of yesterday, insurgents of the new to-morrow.
> We toil not for the lucres of futurity
> But for the cause of freedom, and disdain to borrow
> Glory backed by so worthless a security
> As herosim, a pledge expediently neglected.
> We venture only because we must, for life alone :
> And when the monuments to Peace are re-erected,
> Proudly, we still shall fight—for freedom of our own.

Yet, somewhat negative and selfish. The fight for freedom is not a futuristic futility, requiring no heroism and is not to be waged, proudly or otherwise, for ourselves alone. The outposts of the new world must send out a braver, broader message, and must be held by a more formidable, representative front. "Where are your trumpeters, O Pioneers ?"

A criticism of these amorphous ambitions is provided by W. S. Huxley, the Chairman of the small but active Chelmsford Centre of The Poetry Society, in a dozen *Collected Poems, 1943,* issued as a cyclostyled folio. Mr. Huxley asks :

> What is it men pursue
> Along strange warpings of desire and duty ?
> Some to disrupt a too-slow-changing order,
> Pampered pet of mincing gerontocracy,
> And some to keep a *status quo* that stood
> On feet of sealing wax and vellum ?

Hilda Westrop, M. Bourne, Gladys Millard, Eric Hodgins and other colleagues have a surer touch and a clearer vision than the more ambitious groups.

THE VERLAINE CENTENARY

How many, I wonder, are aware that this year sees the centenary of the poet, Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)? Venerated as a master by the symbolists, and as one of the leaders of the movement, Verlaine created a poetry entirely his own, and his genius spread to England, where it began to show itself in the work of certain poets of the nineties, notably that of Ernest Dowson and Arthur Symons, both of whom translated a number of his poems and did much to introduce his work to English readers.

Of all his work, *Poemes Saturniens* and *Fetes Galantes* are probably his best known, and these early volumes contain gems never surpassed in his later work. Arthur Symons, with whom he stayed when he visited England, wrote of his poetry: "His verse is lyrical as Shelley's, as fluid, as magical . . . It is a twilight art, full of reticence, of perfumed shadows, of hushed melodies." How true this masterly description is! And how noticeable in poems like "Twilight of Mystic Evening," "After Three Years," "Chanson d'Automne," and "Colloquey Sentimental."

Paul Verlaine, like Arthur Symons, was a poet of moods, a poet of impressions, and his poetry for ever conjures up visions of that dream-world in which he lived. Visions of Watteau-like scenes, of gorgeous sunsets and autumnal skies, of ladies in pale colours, of dreams and musings at twilight, and the ghosts of dead lovers in shadowy parks and yew-lined avenues. All this Verlaine's poetry expressed in a few sweet magical lines. What Corot and Watteau portrayed in art, Verlaine transmuted into the gold of song.

Gosforth. AUBREY LEES.

CRITICS OF CRITICISM

Arnold Vincent Bowen, author of *Lyrics of Love and Death,* writes: Surrealism is a perilous style for the unwary. The use of apparently fortuitous symbols, fitting enough as a form of "patch work," is not in itself either good or bad. It is only good, however, when there is an organic, though not necessarily obvious, connection between the garment and its patch.

Mr. Moore's weak and wordy letter is most maladroit. Mr. Moore himself creates the foolish suggestion, nowhere implicit or even raised by your critic, that I am "the greatest living poet"! Yet no reviewer in his senses would make such a claim for any contemporary poet on the strength of one first book! All your reviewer claimed, I think, was that I was *a poet,* while some of the others are *not.*

Was Mr. Moore's long-winded ineptitude and insolence really necessary? This is not merely a war-time question. Mr. Moore carps about indifferent traditional verse. But even a child intended to swell the ranks of poets eventually had surely better begin by looking at fine craftsmanship and experiencing the old-world emotion of reverence before *something;* for to be truly modern is to be vividly aware of the past, not ignorant of it, or contemptuous of it. A very fine critic said that the literary parricide will lack piquancy if he has not been brought up to call his father "sir." Not that he was for parricide, but that he would have even that carried out intelligently. And most people would, I think, agree that it is desirable that the very young should have knowledge of the old stuff before taking up with modernity.

Mr. Moore may or may not be interested to know that I am no longer a young man with my way to make, and reasonably terrified if my poems do not immediately attract attention; and I will take the trouble to tell him (since he seems not to know this) that I am already safe in the esteem of quite as large a little public as any one doing purely poetical work in this country can expect, under the circumstances. But

lest Mr. Moore, if he reads this, should think that I am assailing him in his panoply of poetic learning, let me say this, that if there be no public to-day for my kind of poetry—a highly-debatable point!—I will nevertheless persevere in it, and will, by Heaven's aid, continue to write it, on Charles Lamb's excellent principle, *for antiquity!*

In the meantime, I cannot forbear from thinking that a little natural piety and a large and careful perusal of genuine literary criticism may lead Mr. Moore to the conclusion that it will be better for him to try and attain to some distinction as a poet than to win, thus absurdly, a desperado notoriety as a lean and flashy disputant.

Birkenhead, March 6th, 1944.

In reply to Mr. Nicholas Moore, I should like to put the question, "What is the aim of poetry?" If it does not fulfil the aim we have in view, then it has failed and we may justly condemn it. In my humble opinion the primary object of poetry is the creation of beauty, whether in the philosophy of a Wordsworth or the word-pictures of a Shelley. Though people may have various ideas as to the ingredients of beauty, surely there must be personal associations for the reader, to be appreciated suddenly, as a gleam out of the reality of the inner consciousness. Truth itself may not be a necessity; rhyme, rhythm or even sentiment may be absent, but some form of immediate beauty is essential. And where is beauty most evident? In some obscure, indigestible passage, which has to be worried to discover whether it is alive? Or may we still take Browning as a criterion, when he said:

Simple beauty and nought else
Is about the best thing God invents"?

Perhaps Mr. Moore would prefer this degenerate generation to pack up its books and rest on the laurels of the immortal! But surely these very people we are considering, who live amongst us are striving towards that self-same aim, and Mr. Bowen is succeeding. Time is the final argument, but it should be needless to point out that no poet may be finally judged on one couplet.

As for the surrealist, the impressionist and the intentionally obscure, surely each has had a definite purpose in attempting a transition to other forms of expression, and we should be grateful for their guidance; particularly in regard to what we must avoid! But perhaps we can now begin to find a more stable form, memorable and progressive; but too many poets of to-day do not take sufficient trouble in construction and presentation, which undoubtedly causes this "decline of esteem by the general public." Therefore the reviewer is quite justified when he tells us that, having discovered in a poet something outside "the subfuse pretentions of revolutionary innovators," he finds a particular book significant.

Surbiton. JOHN M. WORTH.

May I beg some space in which to put my spoke into the controversy over "Poets and Pretenders," by criticising the criticism of the critic? Does Mr. Moore really consider the first quotation he picks upon:

Flicker to rest in thy last urn
To move but with the Planet's turn

to be neither deftly economical nor simply beautiful, but to be two poor lines of verses of very little meaning? Every one to his own taste, of course, of whatever genre, and Mr. Moore is entitled to hold his own opinion, but is it bound to be infallible? I, for my part, would cast my vote for the reviewer—not because he is a reviewer, and for that reason bound to be more infallible than Mr. Moore—though I think he would have the better chance of being so!—but because it seems to me he has undoubtedly a better assessment of values, and I most certainly agree with *him* when he says the lines are

both deftly economical and simply beautiful. They are economical because "Flicker to rest" gives an impression of the cessation of all the stress, and energy and joy, and everything that goes to make up the life which is now burning itself out; this phrase is linked to the next "in thy last urn" in that the life, and the body which was the outward and visible sign of that life, have died down from their burning, died down into the ashes (not mentioned, but intimated) contained in the "last urn," with its sense of finality of the whole thing—which is further carried out in "To move but with the Planet's turn," which line also implies a whole vision of the earth in relation to life, time, and the universe, stretching away beyond the limits of even the poet's comprehension, and also shows the "dust to dust returneth" theme. And yet Mr. Moore does not think those two lines are economical! And, surely, the words and their arrangement are simple, and the lines are beautiful, both because their rhythm and sound and meaning do not jar the aesthetic sense and because the wealth of inner meaning is one continuous something and not only just an emptiness of pleasant sound. Even if the author of the lines did not intend to describe a cremation (not having the rest of the poem for reference I cannot tell), even then the lines makes sense, as so often poetry, as distinct from verse, has something of the mystical in it.

Obviously the meaning of the word "turn" was lost on your correspondent, who took it in a sense of sequence and not of movement—no wonder he found very little meaning at all in the lines! Perhaps he would do well to look up the meanings of the word "turn"—or I will save him the trouble. We find that in the Pocket Oxford Dictionary there are listed several meanings of the noun "turn," not only that of sequence, among which meanings we find the example: a turn of the wrist. Surely one can apply this type of sense to the earth also?

And does Mr. Moore think that his other example:

> Staged is the Park is the immortality
> They have forgotten in the city.
>
> It is the oldest church and Parliament
> Most constant lyric and the last lament

is sufficiently clear of meaning not to be classed as obscure? and when a poet becomes consistently obscure, then he should cease to be called a poet—for it is the poet's duty to bring his own conceptions of matters spiritual and material to the mind of others in a pleasing and a lucid manner, pleasing to the sense and to the ear, and not in a tangle of impenetrable confusion and obscurity. If Mr. Moore does not find it obscure, surely not one of us others should need to enquire after its meaning to the tune of a tuppeny-halfpenny stamp—so why the need to offer us any elucidation, free or otherwise!

Mr. Hendry would seem to have the advantage over Mr. Bowen in that his lines can be interpreted by the imagination of the reader to mean almost anything he may choose to guess they mean, and this very elasticity is an absolute symbol of obscurity.

The reviewer is puzzled as to whether the first "is" should be "is" or "in." As I see it it should remain as "is" and there should be a comma after Park Perhaps if I knew what went before the quotation I should understand better what he is endeavouring to explain, but as an isolated quotation both "is" and "in" appear to give much the same meaning to the lines.

The reviewer does not base his assessment of Arnold Bowen as a poet of high order, or his indictment of J. F. Hendry's obscurity on two lines of verse only—I presume he read the whole, or, at least, the most part, of the two books concerned: and I also presume Mr. Moore, as I, has read only those lines quoted by the reviewer?

Why should Mr. Moore be so intent in both cases to pin the meaning down to two lines only, when quite obviously the reviewer's criticism was directed by his knowledge of the whole poem, and his observations as obviously applied to the whole book in each instance ?

I have read only the two lines of Mr. Bowen's poems that were printed in the REVIEW, but I trust that Mr. Moore will consider I have sufficiently understood their meaning. He does not give us any insight into his own interpretation. Perhaps he needed more time in which to think it over than his despatch of his letter gave him, he would appear to have certainly been prompt in taking up cudgels in defence of his preference for modern verse, for which credit is due to him. However, I have still one more bone to pick with him !

He states that, "the ordinary reader, reading his review quickly, may thereby receive a quite false impression. That Mr. Bowen is one of the greatest living poets, for instance !" The reviewer said, "Both technically and emotionally the work is of a high order," which is the sentence, I presume, to which Mr. Moore is referring. I can assure him that it does not give me the impression that Mr. Bowen is one of the greatest living poets, nor can I see any other sentence in the reviewer's criticism which would lead me to think so. Heaven preserve me from placing myself amongst the "big ten" of poetry if some one were some day to consider my work of a high order ! and I venture to think Mr. Bowen has felt no inclination, due to that sentence of praise, to reserve a seat for himself amongst the very highest-ranking exponents of the art.

Regarding the point I raised of an assessment of values, Mr. Moore cries that the need (presumably a need to raise poetry in the esteem of the general public, and to raise that poetry's level, by giving us critics whose lucidity and integrity would be judged by his own standards of modernism) is for the creation of some standard of taste, and he complains that this is what The Poetry Society is failing to do. But surely, oh surely, that is just what they are doing ! It has a very definite and very excellent taste and is anxious to spread the realisation of its high standard not only throughout this country, but throughout the whole world.

It is as much the standard of the poetry that makes a good critic as it is the standard of the critic that makes a good poet, in fact, more so. If there is a dearth of good poetry at present abundance of it will not be enforced and promulgated by unsurpassably excellent criticism. I personally prefer to eschew bad poetry and therefore cannot say on what *that* is dependent (if on anything at all), but I do know that good poetry is good because it cannot help being otherwise, since the true poet works a high standard of integrity and would not be content with anything short of as near perfection as his inspiration and labour will give him. Certainly he does not write good poetry just because the standard of its criticism will be high. Poetry written only with a thought for the critic could not possibly be good, at most it would achieve nothing better than mediocrity, for poetry to be good must be written for its own sake, and for this reason alone, because the poet can do no other than set down his urge and inspiration, and it is just this that does give that air of unstrained inevitability of which the reviewer speaks. And, as Walter de la Mare says of Mary Webb, "And even though an apparent spontaniety may be only apparent, this poetry is at its best when it *seems* most spontaneous." Surely that is true of all poetry, and spontaniety is what "modern" poetry lacks, as far as my knowledge of it goes.

Mr. Moore considers traditional verse should be ignored in order to make complete way for modern verse (I am glad he does not call it modern *poetry*) because it seems to him the latter is the truer indication of the times. He may be right. If so posterity will pass over the present phase in our national literature with a shudder,

for a poet, as, too, a composer, creates for the future while influenced by the present, in which he is living while he writes—but I venture to hope and believe that there are at present as many exponents of the "traditional" style as there are of the modern, perhaps even more so, in spite of the fact that the moderns in many quarters are seizing more of the progressive limelight. But limelight is apt to be a short-lived illumination, while the more steady main source of light, the true poetic urge, goes on burning through the vageries of fashion.

Bude, March 3rd. MARGARET LANDON.

Because Arnold Vincent Bowen's *Lyrics of Love and Death* have come with the impact of true poetry to at least one reader of the book, I would ask Mr. Nicholas Moore to believe me when I say that it is quite accurate for the Reviewer to suggest that Mr. Bowen is destined to become (if he is not already) one of the best living poets. In a few lines, as in "The Field of the Dead," he can invoke pity and terror :

Oh who is this that steals
With such a sighing grace
About the stiffened dead,
Shuddering to and fro—
Covering each blood-soaked face,
Each broken head
With snow ?
The wind, brother ; only the wind
That neither sees nor feels !

I imagine that argument palls before lyricism such as this, and I wish Mr. Moore well in his exploration of these poems when time and mood chime together for him.

The Reviewer has undoubtedly done a service in clearly letting the public know that only *merit* in verse counts in his eyes and that when he discovers merit (as in the above instance) he will indicate its presence. His statement on pp. 62-63 combines the weight of sincerity with the dexterity of good humour.

One does feel, with Mr. Moore, that we have been passing through a difficult, often stony period in poetry as well as criticism. I would commend to any one looking for the fertile regions of the present age in literature the writings, prose and verse, of Mr. Edmund Blunden, where the critic is reinforced by the hale observer of the life of our time.

Wherever there is honesty of outlook there is also "a merry heart," underlying momentary and inevitable sombre emotions. Visits to The Poetry Society Matinees confirm this view. So do readings of the admirable POETRY REVIEW. May both flourish !

Thrumster, Caithness. ARTHUR W. BALL.

THE DEFINITION OF POETRY

In his most interesting letter appearing in the January number of THE POETRY REVIEW—"A Defense of a Non-Defense of Poetry"—Lt.-Col. Cullen Jones states that he has been told that poetry has not been defined in the space of four thousand years of recorded history.

I think I am in a position to state that the *attempt has been made many times* and I can supply the definitions, opinions and remarks of about twenty-four persons who lived within the period stated. Not all of these bear the impress of a clear-cut, final definition, but each one throws light on the subject from his own especial angle. I am indebted for this information to *Poetry and the Ideal*, a much appreciated gift from its

author, Avory H. Forbes (Barrister at Law), who sent me his work after reading my letters in the *Morning Post* in 1937, protesting against the advent of those back-handed, ignoble and formless compositions, denuded of music, bereft of beauty, which are miscalled "modern poetry." Here is the list:

Plato: "The language of the gods."
Aristotle: "Imitation or an imitative art."
Horace: "That which is intended for profit and delight."
Sir P. Sydney: "That fayning notable images of vertues, vices and what els, with that delightful teaching which must be the right describing note to know a poet by"; "Poetry is independent of rhyme and metre."
Bacon: "Some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind."
Shakespeare: "The poet's pen . . . gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name."
Milton: "Poetry is less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate than logic and rhetoric."
Dryden. "The soul of poetry is imitation of the passions."
Dr. Johnson: "Metrical composition"; "the art of uniting pleasure with truth"; "perhaps *metre* is no necessary adjunct to circumscribe"; "Its definition will only show narrowness of definer."
Goethe: "It lifts us into higher regions."
Coleridge: "Opposed to science as having pleasure for its object"; "The best words in the best order."
Shelley: "To apprehend the true and the beautiful."
Wordsworth: "Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."
Leigh Hunt: "Passion for truth, beauty and power."
Macaulay: "Employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination."
Whately: "Elegant decorated language in metre."
Blair: "Language of passion or of enlivened imagination."
Masson: "To represent in an imaginative manner some portion of an outward world."
J. S. Mill: "The deliniation of the emotions."
Jeffrey: "Metrical composition from which we derive pleasure without laborious exercise of the understanding."
Aytoun: "Intellectual pleasure by means of imaginative and passionate language."
Carlyle: "Musical thought"; "Seeing the thing sufficiently."
Matthew Arnold: "A criticism of life."
Alfred Austin: "A transfiguration of life."
T. Watts-Dunton: "The concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in rhythmical language."
Edmond Holmes: "The natural and inevitable expression of strong feeling"; "The expression which the feeling has found for itself"; "Making others feel what the poet himself has felt."

If it may be permitted for me to add my name to this galaxy I would venture to suggest that poetry is "The light behind the curtain" and "Exalted vision illumined by noble expression."

From this list, in which not all the writers are very well known, it is noteworthy that "the Dr. Johnsons and the Drydens" and the much-abused Alfred Austin are not very far behind the others in pertinence or clarity of vision.

Clifford, Hereford. ARTHUR ROW, F.R.S.A.

THE PREMIUM EDITOR'S REPORT

THE prevailing impression left upon my mind by the massive entry for this Premium Competition is that far too many of the poems sent in were deliberately prepared for submission and were not written under any stress of directive inspiration. It cannot be said too often or too loudly that poetry cannot be written to order or for any passing whim, although verses may be. I would classify the bulk of the entry, therefore, as verse, of more or less merit, and my criticism of most of this is that its authors have not yet learned their trade, and verse writing *is* a trade and little more.

The rules are well known. Verses should scan, should rhyme neatly and the metre chosen should be followed religiously, but fluidly, throughout. Technical perfection in these matters will please the ear even when the emotions are left unstirred and the reader will have something of value for labour of perusal. Yet there were very many compositions which added technical incompetence to vapidity or indulged a fancy for free verse to communicate some simple narrative or some objectively-seen landscape, thereby achieving nothing but a mangled prose.

The other chief arts to which mankind pays homage, music and painting, both demand and receive from their neophytes an unremitting apprenticeship to their technical mystery, and not until that has been penetrated and mastered, is it considered useful to attempt either a symphony or a picture. But in poetry there would appear to be another creed. Only here and there in this competition did one meet with that tight yet easy rhythmical fluidity, that air of being the master of words, rhythm and rhyme, which distinguishes the finished student and which alone makes it reasonable to attempt forms which are, alas, only easier apparently, while being for success, immeasurably more difficult. So our poets, at all events too many of them, try to run before they have learned to walk, in the quite erroneous belief that this is permissible and that success may be thereby both swifter and easier. The result is looseness of construction and thought, filling in and mutilation of ordinary language. On the last fault I would observe that I have not before encountered such a slaughter of the innocent article, both definite and indefinite, in the interest of scansion. These poems all appeared to have emanated from Wigan and irrestibly reminded me of a Lancashire comedian without the humour.

These remarks do not apply to all those whose names do not appear below, but they are pertinent to so many competitors that it is necessary to make them quite clearly. The honours list is, for these and other reasons, short, the Premium going this time to a single competitor, EVA MARTIN (Brighton), for a finely-phrased apostrophe of our young fighting men, which worked up to a genuinely exciting climax. There seemed to be not a word too many, nor one misused, in this most unverbose and tightly-rhymed poem.

The Highly Commended list is limited to two names: Juanita Peirse (S.W.1) and W. R. Latham (N.W.3) Both these poems trod very closely upon Miss Martin's heels, Miss Peirse's poem being, in my opinion, immediately behind the winner.

COMMENDED

Deana M. Moore, W.2;
W. S. Eldridge, Bristol, 7;
Jane Scott Parsons, Derby;
A. Slade-Baker, Englefield Green;
Jill Higgs, Dunstable;
Anthony Bristowe, Little Rodsall;
Elizabeth L. Brooke, Leicester;
Joan Eastman, Henley;
Phyllis Dulce Warwick, New Balderton;
Dorothy Birch, Bournemouth;
W. T. Shorthose, Cardiff;
Vere Arnot, Walton-on-Thames;
Kay Toovey, Amersham.

The usual premium offer for the best poem or poems submitted to the Premium

Editor during the month (without limitation of subject) is continued. Not more than four lyrics or o e long poem should be submitted. MSS. should reach "The Premium Editor, THE POETRY REVIEW, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1," by June 1st, accompanied by stamped addressed envelope, and if criticism is desired, 5s. should be sent. It is essential that entrants to this competition be members of The Poetry Society or registered subscribers to THE POETRY REVIEW, and that each poem bears the name and address of the author. (Entries received after the formal closing date are carried forward to the next adjudication.)

Mr. W. B. Bebbington's basic idea in *Introducing Modern Poetry* (Faber, 15s.)—an ample selection of a small number of representative living modern poets for the use of upper forms of schools and for the larger public with an interest in the continuity of English poetry—is admirable, a highly desirable undertaking. But his approach is jaundiced. By "modern" poetry he does not mean contemporary poetry in general. He explains that "all those artists whose expression continues merely to maintain traditions of manner and matter which they themselves have done nothing to create but which are legacies from the past are not considered 'modern.' Stephen Spender and W. H. Auden are modern poets, whereas Walter de la Mare and Edmund Blunden are not." But is there really much difference between the verse forms of these two pairs ? Are the former original in manner and the latter not ? And are the latter merely derivative, without individuality ? Mr. Bebbington asserts that "modern poets are all condemned by popular critics as unintelligible, and that the public, especially the younger public in schools and colleges, has seen too much past and merely contemporary poetry and almost none at all of that modern poetry which represents the living continuity of poetry." Surely the group of protagonists here presented, Cecil Day Lewis, T. S. Eliot, Laurence Whistler, Clifford Dyment, Edith Sitwell, John Pudney, Christopher Hassell, John Lehmann, have not been dismissed as "unintelligible," which may describe many of their imitators and successors in versification who produce the many modern "poems" that are, Mr. Bebbington agrees, "to say the least, esoteric in sense and ugly in form." And from a wide experience of the poetry read in schools and known to the younger generation we know that these moderns are most widely read, often to the exclusion of any acquaintance with any of their predecessors. It is foolish to declare 'that boys and girls are leaving the secondary schools thinking that poetry is the moribund hobby of antiquarians, and as a citizen I also know that most adults have the same idea. "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is still the *pièce de résistance* of the party, and the only contemporary verse that seems to be widely known and appreciated in the dance-tune "lyric" and the music hall "monologue".' Rather a too exclusive acquaintance with these moderns and with much that has followed them and now condemned as "esoteric" and "ugly" has obfuscated continuity and closed their ears entirely to simple musical contemporary work, traditional and precise in form, but personal and arresting in content and to the major English poetry from Milton to Tennyson. Continuity and vitality are not secured by an exclusive devotion to infantalism and adolesence.